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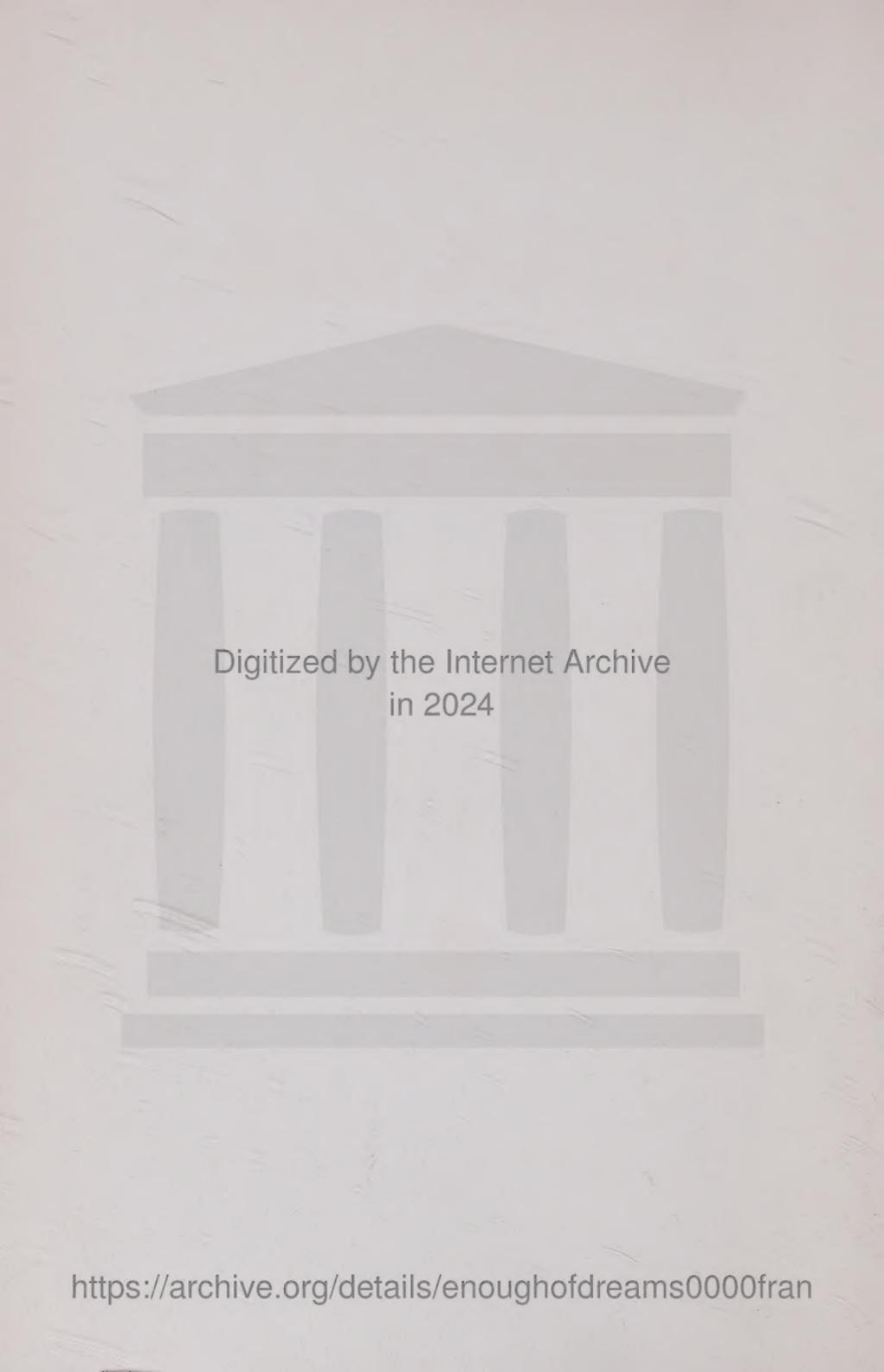


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ENOUGH OF DREAMS



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*Winner of the Mondadori Prize, nineteen twenty-eight*

# ENOUGH OF DREAMS

*by Francesco Perri*

*Translated with an Introduction by  
Charles and Marjorie Tutt*

*Harold Bloom  
- 1931 -*



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953  
P457

To my mother

I dedicate this little rural epic  
which sings the beauty of my land  
and the sorrows of my people

23851



## FOREWORD

WHEN we look around us at the great numbers of foreign-born Italians in our big cities, and read in the newspapers of the great numbers trying to pass the immigration barrier, we are inclined to jump to the conclusion that every Italian in Italy is anxious to come to the new world. We have heard of the great poverty in southern Italy, from which most of our Italian immigrants come, but we seldom realize that southern Italy is one of the loveliest places in the world, and to its inhabitants, the most desirable. Only great economic pressure forces them to leave it, and always the family, a much stronger force there than here, and love of country, are pulling them back, so that they work and dream of the day when they will be able to return. It is this side of immigration that is presented here.

Francesco Perri was born on July 15, 1885, in Careri, the Pandore of "Enough of Dreams," a little town on the Ionian Riviera. At the beginning of the nineteenth century his family had almost feudal control of the village. Due to political upheavals and the early death of several members of the family, his parents were

## ENOUGH

reduced to very modest circumstances. His father, a pharmacist and small landowner, died when Francesco Perri was twelve years old, the eldest of five brothers. He received his primary education at the Seminario Vescovile of Gerace Superiore, head city of the diocese. His secondary education he was forced to get by himself. In 1908 he entered the Postal Service, and thus was able to register in the Faculty of Law at the University of Turin. In 1914 he obtained his degree in Jurisprudence. He then wished to enter the magistracy, but war came, and after having registered in the Faculty of Modern Philology at the University of Pavia, he waived his exemption from military service, given to those in Civil employ, and enlisted in the artillery. He left for the front in 1915, where he joined his brothers. In 1917 he took part in the retreat of Caporetto and as a result, fell seriously ill. He spent eighty days in hospital and was declared unfit for front-line duty for six months. He asked for and received command of a garrison up in the Alps near the French border, and there, two thousand feet above sea level, surrounded by the snowy solitude of winter, he wrote his poem, "La Rapsodia di Caporetto." In the summer of 1918 he returned to the front and in March, 1919, was demobilized and returned to his duties in the Postal Service. In 1926 he resigned from the Civil Service, to dedicate himself to writing. It was then that,

## OF DREAMS

in three months of intense work, from October to December, 1926, he wrote "Enough of Dreams." All his life he had desired to devote himself to writing, but to this time he had found time only for his two books of poetry, "First Songs" (1910), and the "Rhapsody of Caporetto." At the present time he is practising law in Milan, but not to the exclusion of literature, to which, in fact, he devotes most of his time. He is anxious, as he puts it, to regain some of the lost years.

He is now at work on a play which will be presented this Fall and another novel, to be called "Sunset of the World." This will be a more ambitious piece of work than "Enough of Dreams" and will probably be in preparation for some time. It deals with the war, but is more than an interpretation of man's reaction to actual warfare. "I shall try," he said in a recent letter, "to portray the spiritual crisis that my generation faced in 1914, wherein those men who had reached the confluence of moribund positivism and young and insufficient idealism threw themselves into the war as into a furnace of purification."

But the work which he plans to make his masterpiece will be closely united to "Enough of Dreams." In it he will deal once more with his beloved Calabria. Just as "Enough of Dreams" shows the effect of America upon those who go there and return, and on those who stay at home, so the book he plans will

## ENOUGH

picture the effect of America upon those who go and remain. "I would willingly dedicate the rest of my life to this work," he writes. "I dream of coming to America to study the life of my countrymen there, their good and bad fortune, their sorrows and their hopes, and from my study to write a great novel, a true epic of my people wandering over the earth."

Francesco Perri is not a modern. He is very proud to remember that he was born in Magna Grecia. Modernism in all its forms he rejects in favor of the logical, the limpid, the serene.

*Charles and Marjorie Tutt*

*Wilton, Connecticut*

*August, 1929*

# PART ONE



## CHAPTER ONE

THE Citizens of Pandore or as they are more properly called, Pandurioti—a name that has all the perfume of the Ionian colonies—had resolved to act, and in a manner which should remain truly memorable in the annals of Calabria.

A peaceful, modest, frugal people, even a little poor in spirit, they were called “Pandurioti without blood.” But the Pandurioti without blood were about to show everybody, once and for all, how one goes about getting justice, even from the government. They planned to teach an unforgettable lesson to the big landowners of Platí, of S. Ilario and of Siderno. These gallant gentlemen were all outsiders who had, by deceit, by violence and by availing themselves of the magistracy and of political influence, usurped almost all of the Crown Lands of the Commune. And as a final outrage they now employed strangers to cultivate them.

Ancone, the Carruso, the plains of Angelica, Flavia, the Baronali—all stolen land, blood of the poor! The Commune, which might have been one of the richest

## ENOUGH

of the province, was instead the poorest and had to send its children to another world, to America, to earn a crust of bread.

These vast estates which had passed into the hands of aliens closed the village in a circle of iron. It breathed only as much or as little as the owners were pleased to let it breathe. To cut wood, to pasture the flocks, to cultivate a kitchen garden, to sow a fistful of grain, one must flatter these gentlemen who gave themselves the air of protecting and benefiting the Commune while they fed upon it and enjoyed its fruits. And that took no account of the flesh and blood tribute paid now and again by the most beautiful girls of the village.

In the past attempts had been made to recover the lost lands and many had been the agents who had been delegated to end the old dispute, but nothing was ever settled. The gentlemen always found a way to evade the law, if, indeed, anyone ever proposed seriously to apply it. After all, the magistrates, who came from distant places, while they voiced so many good intentions, were really in collusion with the usurpers to cheat the people. And the government, the blessed government, helped along.

This time, however, the effort looked hopeful. First of all at the head of the people was the major, a young lawyer, who knew his way about. And with him was

## OF DREAMS

the school teacher, Don Michelino Fazzolari, also a young man, who had studied four years at Messina and could read and write like God Himself. It was these two who now took the initiative. They had dug up in the municipal archives really definitive documents wherein the rights of the Commune were set forth clearly, as in a will written by the notary. Don Michelino copied the most important passages on a sheet of draft paper, in his fine script with its elaborate flourishes, and went about reading them to everyone so that all should be persuaded and encouraged to act.

“Listen,” cried Maestro Fazzolari, wrapping his muffler around his neck with a swift gesture, “these are documents. I did not invent them myself. Listen! ‘In the Year 1853, on the 28th day of October, in this Commune of Pandore, continuing the operations begun yesterday in company with the persons named, etc., we visited the Communal holding known as Forestola or Macrolis, adjoining the fief of Ancone, etc. . . . We, therefore, in the presence of Signor . . . , the interested party, issued an order to the surveyors Macrì and Romeo to appraise all the aforesaid part of the land of Ancone and to add it to the Communal forest. We therefore declared to the mayor here present, Rosario Zito, that all the said pieces of land pass this day into the free possession of the Commune.’ Do you hear that? ‘—and to him remains the duty of erecting

## ENOUGH

posts so that the boundaries may never again be changed.' Is that clear?"

"Ah, it is as clear as amber. But why did not Rosario Zito keep possession?"

"Why? Because they send him a dish of maccheroni from Siderno!"

"That is one document," continued Don Michelino, filled with fervor, "that is the first. Listen to this other one. 'In the year 1889, on the 17th day of June, in the territory of the Commune of Pandore. In execution of the order of the prefect of the province of Reggio, commissary for the affairs of the Crown Land under date of the 4th inst., we, Giovanni Bosurgi, agent delegated for the said operation, etc. . . . , assisted, etc. . . . , have established existing usurpations and their extent, the nature of the ground, and the names of the illegal landholders, among whom figures Signor . . . , who holds seized lands as per table appended hereafter;—Garden land with mulberries and figs, four hundred acres; brush land and wood land, two hundred and fifty acres; brush land, wood land and part plow land, one hundred acres.'"

The documents existed and they spoke clearly but they had never produced any concrete results. Now the mayor and the new administration were resolved to get to the bottom of the thing at any cost, and in the last session of the Communal council they had ap-

## OF DREAMS

proved an excellent resolution and had sent it to the prefect.

Don Michelino had also copied out the conclusion of this resolution, and read it, especially to the women, who, at the idea of sending their men to America, became furious.

“The Commune,” he read, “has never ceased to demand everything which the kindly laws, destroying feudalism, have granted for the benefit and relief of its citizens. The present effort will be the last. Two roads alone are open to the Commune; either to obtain the restoration of the Crown Lands, thus to enable the people to sustain their families, or to desert the village and emigrate to America in search of the bread which its own country denies it.”

“But did you not tell the prefect that we will go and take the lands if they do not give us justice? Did you not tell him that?” asked the women, with threatening eyes raised above the heads of their children, half naked and dirty. “You should have told him that.”

“One does those things, one does not say them. Moreover we shall see how many of you will come if the thing should go that far.”

“How many? All of us. Even the chickens will come. By God, if anyone stays at home we will draw and quarter him! You will see.”

All summer long at Pandore they spoke of nothing

## ENOUGH

else. They talked of it in the shops, in the streets, on the threshing grounds during the scarce and meager threshing of that unlucky year. They talked of it on Sunday, before, after, and sometimes during mass. They weighed the chances for and against success. They discussed the importance of the documents. They faced doubts of their success and the possible dangers of such an adventure. But in the end they all agreed that they must act. It was really worth while. They would all become little landowners.

The count was soon made. There were two hundred acres at Ancone, about seven hundred at the Carruso,—and then Prato, Angelica, Flavia, the Baronali—in all more than two thousand acres. The population of the Commune counted barely fifteen hundred inhabitants. If the land were distributed to the heads of families each one would have a fine portion, and all excellent land that would grow grain like sand. Such was the interest and so great the hopes awakened in the people that many young men put off their departure for America and the women whose husbands were already there wrote to them to prepare for their return, because very soon the lands would be regained and distributed, and they would have their own America at home.

The year had been bad for the crops on account of the drought, and the autumn was even worse for

## OF DREAMS

the harvest of olives. Twice during the month of August the lupa had appeared on the sea,—that terrible fog of the sirocco which comes from the shores of Africa. The olives, spotted with red and eaten away with rot, fell from the trees at every breath of the wind.

There had been little emigration to America among the Pandurioti. Since they were for the most part peasants, almost all of them illiterates who had never stuck their noses outside their doors, the thought of so great an adventure filled them with a sort of mysterious terror. A workman or two who had ventured it had no great luck. From nearby villages where emigration had been somewhat larger there came unfavorable news. A man from Platí was killed by the Black Hand. Another from Bovalino had his leg cut off by a train. Of some they had no news at all. So the new move to regain the Crown Lands was welcomed as a pretext for remaining at home.

They waited for the prefect to give an official answer to the resolution of the council. But already it was the middle of September and the prefect kept a dignified silence.

The wine shop of Porzia Papandrea was one of the places where the discussions became most heated. The dark little room was half filled by a blackened counter on which the salt scales rocked. A strong odor of an-

## ENOUGH

chovies and a heavier and more nauseous odor from a tub of stock-fish rose and mingled with the perfume of tobacco. In the middle of the ceiling hung an acetylene gas lamp which gave a cold white light and added its pungent and penetrating smell, like that of garlic, to the laden air. Behind the counter Porzia Papandrea, with her big pock-marked face framed with hair still black, her enormous flabby breasts hanging down her belly like a double bladder of liquid, and wearing a glass necklace of big yellow grape stones, served a customer or two with a heavy and resigned indolence. Now and then she moved aside, uneasily, a green curtain that hung in the doorway that led to the rear, from whence issued, amid the subdued whispering of a very intimate conversation, the shrill laughter of her daughter, Vittoria.

Assembled in the shop to buy a penny's worth of *erba santa* or a Neapolitan cigar were Don Gianni Cúfari, cashier of the Commune, Don Gialormo, head of the rural police, Galeoto, a builder's laborer who had spent sixteen years in jail for homicide and had returned with an illustrated edition of the "Battle of Benevento" which gave him the name of a man of letters, and Rosario Cosenza, another who had learned to read in prison and was called a lawyer because he went around with a pocket edition of the Five Codes, and Don Michelino Fazzolari. All but Don Michelino,

## OF DREAMS

between one discussion and another, sipped anise appreciatively, smacking their lips. He was not drinking. Instead he smoked Macedonia cigarettes, breaking them in half for economy, and waved off objections like Jesus among the doctors.

“As true as God the mayor is afraid. He is a chicken.” With his hat on the back of his head and the extracts from the documents waving in the air, Don Michelino fanned the flame.

“He’s afraid? Well then, let him quit being mayor,” shouted Galeoto, and ground his teeth. He thumped his fist on the counter and a tray of glasses danced and tinkled.

“You say the mayor is afraid,” said Cosenza, taking the Five Codes from an inner pocket of his coat. “He is right to be afraid. I, I do not find those laws of the feudal property in here.”

Don Michelino stared. “Feudal laws? What do you mean?”

“I am asking you that, I am.”

“Me? Who talked of such laws?”

“You did. Holy Devil, you did, yourself! In that paper you have been going around reading to everybody. In the Code those laws aren’t to be found. Here you are, take a look for yourself.”

“Ignoramus!” Don Michelino shouted in his face. “Ignoramus! If you don’t know it they are the laws

## ENOUGH

enacted by King Gioacchino, the one they killed at Pizzo."

Cosenza was dumbfounded. Don Gianni Cúfari held his belly with laughter.

"Ha-ha-ha! What do you say, Cosenza?"

"Whatever you say," said Cosenza, "they are laws that are no longer worth anything. Otherwise you would find them in the Code."

"In a word, then," interrupted Don Michelino, furious, "you are trying to cast doubt on the fact that the lands belong to the commune."

"Nothing of the kind. But I do say that they are not in the Code. You can't play with the law, my dear Don Michelino, and if we don't do things according to the rules we will all go to jail."

"Let's hear the opinion of Guerrazzi," said Don Gialormo, shooting a long stream of saliva across the floor. "Just let us hear the opinion of Guerrazzi."

"You want to know the opinion of Guerrazzi? I'll tell you that right now," he answered, rolling his eyes that were yellow like those of a cat. "My opinion is that for more than fifty years these frogs of Panduriti have been after their lands and they have never succeeded in so much as pulling a spider out of a hole. Now it seems to me that the time has arrived to act in earnest."

## OF DREAMS

“And so you think that is the thing to do?” asked Don Gianni Cúfari with a mocking laugh.

“If we are Christians with two fingers of baptism, that is the thing to do.”

“Listen,” said the old man, “I have been living here for more than thirty years. I’ve seen at least ten of these attempts begun. Believe me, my dear fellow, it is not our affair. Has anyone died and left you heir to these lands? No? Well then, don’t think about them. Or rather, let us not think about them. Let us all put our hearts at peace, and if anyone must go to America, let him go. The Crown Lands will remain with those who now hold them.”

“There you are, there you are! They are the ones who have ruined the Commune!” shouted Don Michelino, congested with excitement, shaking his hands on high in a gesture of comical intercession. “It is these old men who have ruined our Commune. Always they are ready to take fright—always they are ready to bend their backs and take down their britches.”

“We’ll see what you will do, oh new Messiah of the Jews.”

A crash of dishes from the back room followed by a shrill scream from Vittoria interrupted them.

Porzia heaved her great bulk from behind the counter and raising the green curtain she began to shout in her whale’s voice:

## ENOUGH

“By the Eternal Father, I’ll cut the heads off both of you!” and she disappeared.

“Musica!” exclaimed Don Gialormo.

“What’s going on?”

“Porzia,” explained the head of the rural police in a whisper, “is jealous.”

Porzia Papandrea in her day had been one of the most beautiful women in the village, a type of that vigorous, almost barbaric beauty made of flesh and of blood, of insatiable ardors and of essential elements, which personifies the loves and longings of the common people. Left a widow when still young, with a baby daughter and a tavern to run, she had been mistress of almost all the dashing young bloods of the town. When the ardors of youth weakened and the lusty spirit of love yielded the field to practical considerations, she chose from among her lovers the one who gave her greatest guarantee of faith, and at the same time, by his economic condition, represented security for the future of her daughter, a girl who was growing with the hours, filled with a youthfulness more impetuous and more arrogant than her mother’s had been.

Porzia’s choice fell upon Bruno Ceravolo, a farm steward, a widower and without direct heirs, who spent his income in taverns and in his widower’s love affairs. She, having passed her fortieth year, grew old rapidly. She became a formless mass of fat and sloth, and of

## OF DREAMS

her former beauty there remained only her hair, black and shining, which with its splendor accentuated the disgusting dissolution of that body that once had turned the heads of the whole village. Of her relations with Bruno Ceravolo there remained only a weary habit, full of quarrels and anger. Youth, which fled from her, transferred itself and multiplied itself in her daughter, a giant of a girl who got from her mother not only the instincts and the tendency toward full and reckless enjoyment, but also a practical sense and a calculating attitude to everything, not excluding love.

She had many suitors in the village, but while she wagged her tail for everybody she nursed an ambitious project that she alone knew of, and which had brought war into the family.

Bruno Ceravolo, at fifty, was a hard, dry man with tea-colored skin, and the deep wrinkles on his sharp face gave an impression of energy rather than of age. He wore a coat and short trousers of fustian and woolen stockings to his knees, with high boots of calfskin decorated with arabesques around the lacings. His movements were agile, vigorous and rapid, his hands rugged and powerful and covered with red hair. He seemed an organism wrought in iron. In matters of love he believed his youth was yet to pass.

All day long he watched the splendid girl, Vittoria, full of blood and health, with mighty flanks and a

## ENOUGH

breast that seemed about to burst through her corset. Vittoria was not long in realizing that certain caresses from this man were too bold and insistent to be paternal, and it was then she conceived her great plan. Her mother was growing old. She would take her place, not as Bruno's mistress, however, but as his wife.

That evening, in the room behind the green curtain, while Vittoria washed dishes Bruno played with her and passed his hand over her back as one does with a fine mare. Suddenly he seized her and tried to kiss her on the mouth. She struggled free, but her elbow knocked over a pile of plates with a great clatter. When Porzia appeared, Bruno, his eyes on fire, was trying to hold the girl while she fought and flicked him in the face with a dripping and dirty dishrag.

Then war broke loose. Accusations, shouts, yells, imprecations, and finally the plaintive and tired weeping of Porzia, who had sunk down in a corner and was lamenting like a sick cow. The customers crept out to the square, one by one.

In the shop only one young man sat on, atop an empty herring barrel in a dark corner. All through the discussions of the others he had remained silent. With a deep frown toward the green curtain, from behind which came the laughter of Vittoria, he had listened to that familiar chattering that held a rustle of kisses and a hint of caresses in it.

## CHAPTER TWO

**B**UT the discussion cut short in the shop of Porzia Papandrea continued in another part of the village.

After supper, in the pleasant and mild September evenings, the peasants gathered on the outside steps of the stucco houses, all cracked by the earthquakes and the humidity of the sirocco. The young men courted the girls, the old women spun and chattered and the men talked of the crops, the bad years, the few emigrants who had succeeded, and the local government. The moon, suspended over the sea like an immense silver globe, lit up the gardens. Now near, now far, the song of the last horned owl came to them.

The place where the meetings were largest and the discussions most passionate was the stairway of Rocco Blèfari which faced the sea at the end of the *Ruga Grande*. In front was a sort of square called the *Murrello*, and an abandoned garden surrounded by half-fallen stone walls which served for those who found no room in the tiny amphitheatre of the steps. The

## ENOUGH

women sat at the top and the men at the bottom. In the middle, on the landing, seated on a little chair covered with sedge, was Rocco himself like an ancient patriarch, barefooted and in his shirtsleeves. His long legs, as dry as burnished boxwood, were half hidden by his drawers which came down below his short trousers of coarse wool. On his head he wore a knotted blue checked handkerchief, simulating at the corners of his forehead two little horns like those of a faun. He had worn shoes but two hours in his whole life, and when he told of his sufferings on that occasion he made the whole village laugh. It had been at his own wedding. "I thought I should die," he would say. After the ceremony he took them off and went to the wedding dinner barefoot. His feet were so tough, the villagers said, that he could walk on prickly pears and never notice the spines.

Every day, before the roosters greeted the dawn, he was up and around the village gathering manure. In one hand a reed basket and in the other a little hoe, he went through all the streets searching for the offal of donkeys from the front of the stables and of pigs from the doorsteps of the houses. He put it carefully into the basket while he murmured, "This is bread—this is the grace of God."

He had four children, two boys and two girls. His wife had been dead for more than ten years and his

## OF DREAMS

daughter, Giusa, kept his house. Of the two sons, the elder, Pietro, was lost after the daughter of Porzia Papandrea. He was a headstrong young devil as big as St. Christopher, a regular ox for work, and he planned to go to America to put aside a few thousand lire to marry her. The other, Giosofatto, whom they called Gèsu, was an intelligent boy who felt a calling for the priesthood, but since there was no money to send him to the seminary he had to content himself to serve the priest in the little church. First he learned to work the bellows of the organ, then to serve at mass, and now he sung at Vespers the *Dixit Dominus* and the *Kyrie* at high mass, better than the priest himself. He was affianced to an orphan girl, adopted by a moderately well to do peasant couple. He, too, intended to go to America in search of money. The girl's foster parents gave her to him unwillingly because she would have a fine dower and he was poor.

The idea of America was for Rocco a thorn in the heart. He had never been on a train in his life, and at the thought of his children crossing the ocean and going to distant unknown lands among people who spoke a strange language he felt his blood freeze. The regaining of the Crown Lands meant to him the saving of his sons.

The papers spoke clearly. The lands belonged to the municipality. All that was necessary was to have justice

## ENOUGH

done. But would the magistrates render them this justice? And by the word magistrates Rocco meant all those who had a public function. To get justice—there was the difficulty.

“I have seen too many of them,” said Rocco, pouring out in the palm of his hand some tobacco from a special box made of the bark of bergamot, “I have seen so many of these reallotments. Every time the gentlemen fall out or the government changes or a new election is announced there comes from Reggio one of those ink suckers that are found in offices. He calls in the experts, the oldest men of the village, and goes out to survey the Crown Lands. Rods, cords, levels—it seems God Himself wants to build His world over again. Then the gentlemen take the official home, fill him up with chicken and with coins, and the reallotment finishes right there. For the poor, justice is a serious thing! Have you ever seen justice? I have.”

“And where?” asked Passarelli.

“In court,” replied Rocco seriously. “I was once at Gerace Marina—but to give evidence, because by the Grace of God I have never been in trouble with the law. When I entered the room I saw, high up on the wall, a crucifix. This is fine, I said to myself. It is our Lord Jesus Christ, may He be praised today and forever! And if you swear falsely you will go to the country of Mohammet as straight as a dart. But above

## OF DREAMS

the crucifix there was painted on the wall a beautiful woman. Ah, she was really beautiful! She had a pair of breasts like those of Porzia when she was green. You don't believe me? It is true. She held in one hand a sword and in the other scales. They told me she was Justice. Then I understood a number of things about this world! Just tell me, who is it that keeps the scales? The shopkeepers, the people who sell. Justice, then, is a shop, and when there is a shop around, my friends, the poor are always wrong."

"It is exactly like that," said Varvaro, a lanky old man who was the uncle of Gèsu's fiancée. "And then the gentlemen are too powerful. They are everything, magistrates, mayors, deputies. They have the government up their sleeves."

"It isn't that," said Rocco, "that isn't the secret. I'll tell you what it is. It's this, when those gentlemen want to get something they know how to go about it. They send their mules traveling, loaded with cheese. And you know what the proverb says. 'The gift enters by the door and the devil flies out of the window.'"

"Never mind all that. Will you come, or not, if we go to seize the land?" asked Cataldo, a peasant as black as a Sudanese. "Because, my friends, it is useless to talk philosophy. If we go we must all go, old and young, men, women and children, and if anyone is

## ENOUGH

missing, by the Lord, we will drive him out of his house with fire, as you drive foxes out of their holes."

"If anything happens I'll be there," answered Rocco, "but I know how it will all end."

"Tell us how," said Passarelli.

"I'll tell you right now. We'll all go to jail."

"Listen to the Prophet Habbakuk speak!" exclaimed Rosa, Rocco's younger daughter. Then she ran swiftly down the steps to avoid his slap. Her chestnut hair fell in two big tresses down her back as she ran. Everybody laughed.

"You did well to get out," said Rocco, laughing under his moustache. "You did well! Otherwise I should have measured those mare's shoulders of yours."

She was a high-spirited girl with a dark and eagle-like face, and a small forehead. Her eyes were variegated in the irises, which softened voluptuously the boldness of her glance. On her left cheek was the scar of a pimple which had been cured with a hot iron, and if the mark, round and shining like a copper penny, spoiled to a certain degree the beauty of her face, it gave it at the same time an exotic touch. To see her, so full of health, with shining eyes, red lips, round breast, and with that hard bird-like glance, brought to mind those fine young pullets that are brought in from the country at the beginning of August, their wattles

## OF DREAMS

red and crests aslant, and are offered with pride to the cocks of the country-side.

“Diavolo!” said Rosa, who had recovered from her fit of laughter, “if you men are afraid to go the women will take the lands. The peppers are ripe at the Baronali.”

“Per la malogna, they are ripe! The garden is all red like a field of poppies.”

Gèsu, who watched with hungry eyes now the moon, now his fiancée, broke his silence.

“Go ahead—go ahead and take the lands and the peppers of the Baronali, but I’ll not go.”

“And why not?” asked Mariuzza, resting her spindle on her knee. “Why don’t you want to go?”

“Because I have something else in my head. I am going to America.”

“Oh, America—that cursed place!” exclaimed the girl angrily.

“Yes, I am going away,” continued Gèsu. “I won’t stay any longer in this accursed land.”

“I am going, too,” said the son of Cataldo, a dark young fellow as big as his father.

“Let them go! Let them go!” shouted Rocco. “These young fellows believe that America is no farther away than the Marina di Bovalino, and that you find money there on the ground like pebbles in a river. You’ve got straw in your heads, my boys—barley straw.”

## ENOUGH

“This is an accursed land,” repeated Gèsu, “cursed by God and by the saints.”

Rocco became angry. “Accursed? How is it accursed? Why, don’t you know this is the most beautiful land on the whole world? Here we have everything, every good and every grace of God. Let us begin with the springtime—in April we have lettuce, in May beans and peas, in June cherries, medlars and fig blossoms and barley and corn already ripe. In July we have pears, apples, peaches and prickly pears, in August there are pomegranates and figs, in September grapes, nuts and winter apples and pears. In October begins the olive, and on the mountains there are chestnuts. You can say that there is not a month in which the Lord does not give us a fruit. Where will you find a country like this? Remember, my children, that the earth is never accursed, the earth is of God.”

They all became silent.

From the end of the street came the notes of a guitar. It was Mastro Genio, and with him were Peppe Liano and Nino Sperlí. Sperlí was a barber, but recently returned from America, who went around all day long dressed in his best clothes, with a fine pair of yellow shoes and a chain of plated gold. Before they arrived in front of Rocco’s steps they stopped.

“Fellows, let us greet them in the American fashion,” said Nino Sperlí.

## OF DREAMS

“How do you do that?” asked Liano.

“Like this—you say this: *Cunnaiti!* it means good-night.”

When they arrived before the group they greeted them in chorus, “*Cunnaiti, cunnaiti!*”

“Ho, Mastro Nino,” said Rocco, “welcome. Tell me a minute, is the moon in America like the one we have here?”

“You think you have said something witty,” said Sperlí seriously, “and instead it is stupid, if you will excuse me, friend Rocco. The moon that you see here can’t possibly be like the one in America because, if you don’t know it, when it is night here it is day there.”

Rocco, face to face with this confident answer, stared. His ideas became confused and without further ado he became convinced that the moon in America was a different one.

“Ih! Son of God!” exclaimed young Cataldo. “What kind of a country is this America, anyway? How far away is it, then?”

“It must truly be at the ends of the earth,” said Rocco, “because our Lord created the moon to light the whole world at once. Instead, in America, at this hour it is day.”

The women looked at one another in wonder. Rocco asked, “Tell me, Mastro Nino, since you have traveled

## ENOUGH

so far, where is the world largest, where the sun rises or where it sets? To me it seems that the world is biggest in that direction," and he pointed to the north.

"You are right," said Sperlí, "the world is biggest in that direction, but America isn't up there. The ships follow the sun to go there, and after eight days they arrive."

"And the sea of America is bigger than this one?"

"This one! Why this one—excuse the term—is a water of horses compared with that of America. This is a little sea. The one that you cross to go to America never ends, and it has waves as high as mountains! For eight days you see nothing but water and sky, sky and water, so that you get dizzy just thinking about it."

Mastro Genio, his guitar on his belly, his legs wide apart, looked with tender eyes at Rosa. That son of the devil of a Liano had gone to sit beside Giusa and now and then whispered in her ear, "I must speak to you."

Giusa turned a thousand colors and whispered back, "For the love of God be quiet or my father will kill me."

Rosa, naturally bold and animated by the presence of her fiancé, asked a question.

"In America you are pretty well off, Mastro Nino. Can women go there, too?"

"In America the women rule," he replied. "They are the bosses."

## OF DREAMS

“Women rule?” asked Rocco, blank astonishment on his face. “What kind of country is that?”

“It is this kind of a country. The government isn’t like ours. There it is a republic, and where there is a republic the woman rules, so much so that women in America is called man.”

“Man?” the girls asked with bursts of laughter.

“What is that you say, Sperlí?” asked Passarelli. “How is it possible that woman is called man? Then what do they call a man?”

“You don’t believe it? It is as true as God. Ask anyone who has been there. What is the word for man in our language? It is *uomo*. But in America woman is called *uomo* and man is called *menne*. When a man is rich they call him a *riccimenne* and when he is a business man they call him *bissinismenne*.”

Everybody wondered at the mysterious America, where the social system was so different from theirs, where the women were called men and ruled.

Mastro Nino shifted from one foot to the other on his yellow shoes of Russian leather which he had bought in *New Yorka* in a great street that was named *Mulberri-stritti*. Rosa followed up with questions in rapid succession.

“Then, Mastro Nino, the girls in America are really called men?”

“Let us not become confused,” said Sperlí. “The

## ENOUGH

women are called men but the girls are called *ghelle*."

Laughter rose from the stairs. The women squealed like geese.

"*Ghelle*? And what does *ghelle* mean?"

"*Ghelle* means girls. Why do you laugh? And the girls of America aren't at all like ours, who are afraid to go out of the house. The girls of America go alone to the ends of the world and no one touches them."

"They must be ugly," observed Liano.

"Ugly? If you don't go to America you don't know what beautiful women are. The American girls seem to be a mixture of blood and milk. Half naked, with little silk dresses which are as if they didn't have any at all—nose in the air, stick in the hand, and a cigarette in the mouth!"

"Oh, grandissimo diavolo!" exclaimed Mariuzza, scandalized. "And they smoke, too, the hussies."

"Of course they smoke. And they go horseback, and they fight," and he made the gesture of punching, "so that you stay with your mouth open for two hours. If they like you they say come here! They take you by the arm and away you go to a restaurant and to the theatre, and they pay. If they don't like you they call a *pulisi* and get you locked up. And you should see their legs and their breasts! Not at all like those of Gnura Rosa!" and he pointed at Blèfari's daughter.

## OF DREAMS

“Oh! Mala pasqua!” she exclaimed, offended. “Where do I come in with American women?”

“Oh, I was just talking,” Sperlí answered with a smile. “After all, you are a pretty good *ghella*, aren’t you?” And since he knew that Rosa was handy with her fists he doubled up his own in mock defense. The girl, gathering her knitting needles and her sock in one hand, flew at him.

“Go to the devil, you and your American *ghelle*.”

The women rocked with laughter. The men roared.

“Ohe! Do you want to kill me?” shouted Sperlí, and a hissing laugh came out of his lips in puffs, as though worked by a bellows in his fat, round stomach.

Here Mastro Genio interfered. He took her by the arm and drew her against him. As he felt her body against his a sense of unreality swept over him that he could thus touch her, his affianced wife.

“And you, too, defend him?” And Rosa turned on him like a viper. “Just wait a minute.” And dropping her knitting she grabbed him by the shoulders. He barely had time to hand his guitar to Sperlí when he stumbled and slumped down onto the legs of Passarelli.

“Are you crazy, per la malogna?” shouted Rocco. “Aren’t you ashamed?”

“You caught me unaware,” said Mastro Genio, all red and dusty. “If you want to fight in earnest, let’s fight.” And he approached again. But Rosa, panting,

## ENOUGH

her face flushed and proud because she had knocked down a man, paid no attention to him, but stood fixing her tumbled hair.

When the laughter quieted down Gèsu asked, "What kind of work did you do in America, Sperlí? Were you a barber?"

"My dear fellow, to be an American barber you need a hand much finer than mine. I was a *ere boyá*."

"*Ere boyá*? What kind of work is that?"

"*Ere boyá*," Sperlí explained, "is the here-boy, the one who brings the water. We work in a gang. Every gang has a *bosso* and a lot of men. Naturally the workmen get thirsty, and in that country you haven't a fountain at every step. So the boss takes one of the workmen and gives him that job, to carry water. He is the *ere boyá*."

"And did you like your job?" asked Gèsu.

"I liked it fine. I got two dollars a day and didn't do anything."

"Yes, but now you've come home to Pandore," said Rocco.

"That is true," said Sperlí, and his face saddened. "What can you expect? When I'm here I want to be in America, and when I was in America I dreamed every night of home. This land follows you to the end of the world and doesn't let you rest. What did I leave behind me? Poverty. And yet these dirty, ugly

## OF DREAMS

streets, these houses, these gardens—I had them continually before my eyes. I ate maccheroni and drank beer and thought of the tavern of Porzia Papandrea. It seemed that without me the smell of the stock-fish would be lost. When I was there I slept in a shanty, and since I was the *ere boyo* I got up a little late in the morning. When I woke up and looked around me and saw only the walls of planks blackened by smoke, and heard only the grumbling and stamping of the men going to work or quarreling before the wash house, I wept like a child. I remembered the time when I slept in my own vineyard at Mirto on a bed of broom flowers. In the morning I was awakened by the larks or by one of my own roosters crowing at me, beating his curved spurs as though he were a knight out of the *Reali di Francia*. I opened my eyes and saw the sea and the clouds over the water flying before the dawn, and the crickets sang all around me. Oh, I tell you it is a difficult thing to forget this country.”

They all sat lost in thought, conquered by a strange melancholy.

The night was sweet. The moon hung over the gardens and the houses clear and bright like a great silver paten. From the fields came the strident voice of the locust and the gloomy song of the toad, as if echoed and reechoed from the four corners of the world, an

## ENOUGH

astral voice that descended from the heights of the sky. On the sea, agleam with moonlight, the black profile of the beautiful campanile of Bovalino, like a cypress amid the forest of olives that surrounded the town, was outlined. Boni seemed to emerge into the light like an island. A peasant at the Gabelle tuned his bagpipe.

What did this land hold that enabled it to conquer the heart, and to be remembered and regretted from every corner of the world, wherever its children wandered in search of bread? There was no answer, save in the heart.

It was a strange and varied country, irregular, with crags and ravines where the arid and precipitous coast alternated with swamp and olive grove. The wasteland, invaded by pampas grass and mastic, stretched out beside the cane brake surrounded by rushes and maiden-hair ferns. The aloe and the brambles flowered beside the mountain ash. It seemed so dry and stony, and yet every shower caused grass to sprout in every corner and on every path. Its vegetation was poor, and yet it bore the fruits of every season, of every perfume and of every taste, as those that grew in Eden. And there was the sea a few steps away and the mountains opposite—the high mountains—with chestnut and fir and

## OF DREAMS

pine, the forests in which the wolf rested at noon and the wild boar grunted.

On each of the hills were old walls, naves of ancient abandoned churches. They were the ruins of towns destroyed by earthquakes throughout the ages. And yet, beside the ruins other houses sprang up, other churches, other campanili. The survivors buried their dead and rebuilt like the ants, on the tombs. They reclaimed their lands from storm and flood, and founded thereon their labors and their hopes.

In this land, so varied, so picturesque, so full of contrasts—apparently poor and inherently rich, sweet, dignified and gentle—there was a certain similarity to the life and the soul of its inhabitants.

The soul of Calabria is full of contrasts. Profoundly, almost violently good, it has singular aridities. All the good fruits of the heart—hospitality, fidelity, devotion to family, strength under sorrow, abnegation, heroism—flourish in it, and are often touched with the gentle perfume of poetry. And yet the life of the Calabrian is sad, full of pain, narrow, like the landscape which, while having so many elements of beauty, does not seem beautiful—or perhaps veils its beauty with a deep and aching discontent.

“Let us go to bed,” said Rocco Blèfari, looking at the sky.

## CHAPTER THREE

*A*T the end of September the prefect had not yet replied.

When the mayor went to stir him up he talked a great deal but said nothing. He cautioned him against making any seditious speeches and warned him against seditious acts. If he did so act the government would have to intervene with force. He promised to send the agent of the Crown Lands to Pandore but could not say definitely when. Personally he wanted nothing more to do with the affair since he had already delegated the underprefect of Gerace Marina, under whose jurisdiction the affair came, to act for him.

When this news spread through the village it aroused an unbelievable ferment. Don Michelino, with his extracts of the Crown Land documents, made every peasant feel himself a defrauded heir. Everywhere proposals and protests became furious. All sorts of rumors contributed to the excitement—the prefect wanted to give justice but had been threatened by the deputy whose brother held some of the contested land; the under-

## OF DREAMS

prefect of Gerace was a glutton for money, a Sicilian loaded down with children to whom the Well of the Star would not have sufficed, and to trust affairs to him would be to hand over the sheep to the wolves; and how could he give justice to the people when every morning there appeared before his door two mules bearing gifts from the land owners? The peasants were in confusion and they did not hold a handbreadth of land to cultivate because the landowners, informed of the contemplated action of the Commune, had excluded the Pandurioti from every concession.

As soon as it was seen that the magistrates would not give justice they would give it to themselves, per la malogna, and woe to him who stayed away! But side by side with the warlike threats appeared doubts and perplexities based on former experience. Other attempts had been vain and so would be this one. Discouragement seized them, distrust of everything and of everyone, that abysmal state of mind in which the citizen no longer has faith in social justice but considers the state a monstrous machine armed against him. And since he has no strength to oppose it he becomes inwardly corrupt, vile, servile, an exploiter, an outlaw against this organization of injustice, or a rebel against the wrongs of society and against his own wrongs.

If it should prove impossible to get back the lands,

## ENOUGH

the only course left was to emigrate, to seek elsewhere, among distant people, that bread which their own country denied to its children.

They thought of those from near-by villages who, by emigrating, had bettered themselves. There had been one or two from Pandore. Vincenzo Mantica had remodeled his house, put in cement floors and iron balconies with rings at the corners for flower vases. Ciccio Musolino, who had gone away as poor as Job, had built himself a house with a fine open loggetta painted yellow, and had on his kitchen table a big oilcloth cover with Brooklyn Bridge painted on it, and in the middle a great Madonna whom the Americans called Liberty. These Americani had a thousand other luxuries in their houses, many unusual domestic conveniences such as mechanical corkscrews, beveled mirrors, rubber boots, saws with well-turned handles, razors and other toilet articles shining like silver. One had brought home an egg beater, and another a machine for making maccheroni.

Those who had come home from America gave one the impression of knowing how to live, of knowing a different life, a life more comfortable and happier than that of the old world, a life in which man was something more than a beast of burden wearing himself out year by year on his land. Here he dragged out his days behind a she-ass or a milch cow, to tear from the earth a

## OF DREAMS

wretched existence, without joys, without satisfactions, embittered by the invincible poverty of surroundings which gave no consolation save the sun of the good God and the grace of nature.

But even in America life was not all roses. Some of the emigrants had returned sick with certain mysterious diseases which never before had been heard of in the village. Others had been injured and had received no compensation. Even the consul betrayed them. Peppe Cúfari, for all the fingers on his right hand, had received but two thousand lire. What could they do, poor, unlettered peasants, who were incapable of writing even two lines to their own families? Everybody made money at their expense.

Some had died, far away in an unknown country, without a relative or a friend. In the village they lived like a big family whose joys and sorrows were shared by all, and were consecrated in the little church, their common home. To die amid strangers, without comfort, without their own people, perhaps even without Christian burial, and especially without the sad and consoling lament of their bells—there was nothing that terrified them more.

As a solution of the problems resulting from poverty and bad harvests, emigration found increasing support among the men. The women fought it doggedly. For them America meant separation from their husbands,

## ENOUGH

the continual anxiety of waiting, the fear of the unknown, perhaps widowhood—perhaps even that cruel widowhood of abandoned wife who knows her man is alive and healthy and is taking his pleasure in the arms of a strange woman, the adventuress of the city. Conjugal affection was mingled with jealousy, and they were filled with fury. They assailed the magistrates and sometimes even God Himself, Who allowed so many injustices in His world.

In the general perplexity it was the women who, more than anyone else, blew on the fire, incited the souls of the people to action, and proposed the boldest moves. They should set fire to the town hall, to the prefect. They should kill the tax collector. They should go to Gerace and take the under-prefect and ride him around on a pole as though he were the pelt of a wolf killed in the mountains. The mildest counsel was that they should arm themselves, men and women, and take possession of the lands in spite of the authorities. They would see what the prefect would do!

The mayor, a young lawyer fresh from his studies, was animated by a great good will, but was timid and without experience. He had a concept of social justice that was wholly philosophical and idealistic and a spiritual honesty absolutely unadapted to the reality of politics. Seeing that violence was about to replace his plan for a legal settlement, he reared like a horse before

## OF DREAMS

a high obstacle for which it has not taken its stride. An orderly man, coming from the land-owning class of the bourgeoisie, he felt an instinctive uneasiness when confronted with the idea of violating the property of others, even though he was convinced of the justice of the cause.

The thing was easier said than done. The Pandurioti were orderly people, as, after all, everyone is in Calabria. Calabria is the classic country of the brigand, but in no region of Italy is there so much respect, or, at least, so much fear, of the constituted authorities. Everyone was uncertain, but ready to act in some way, and in the confusion of arguments and agitated and conflicting proposals a compromise had to be found that would both satisfy the scruples of the mayor and give vent to the spirit of the people which could no longer be held back.

After long and laborious study and many heated discussions between the mayor and Don Michelino, who wanted to set out like a rocket, a compromise was found. They would go, but they would carry the national flag and the portraits of the king and queen at the head of the procession.

This plan was received with shouts. This was the touch needed to rouse them still more and to encourage the waverers. To carry the portraits of the king and queen was, for the Pandurioti, as though the

## ENOUGH

royal family in person took part in the expedition. The king and queen were held to be invulnerable against everyone, and especially against the possible action of the government. "Is it not the king who makes the laws? Certainly! And who makes the laws respected? The carabinieri! And are not the carabinieri the servants of the king? Precisely!" And so everything was settled. It would be fine to see the carabinieri, sent by the prefect himself or by the deputy, gape when they saw the portraits of Their Majesties in the middle of the crowd. "There is nothing to be done here," they would say, and they would go away with their tails between their legs.

The men considered the portrait of the king sufficient. The queen goes out so little, and certainly not in the country. But the women demanded the queen, the Montenegrin as dark as they were and with beautiful eyes, shining like mulberries washed in the rain. Since they were going on the expedition it was just that the queen should go, too. She would be the protectress of the women.

Haste was needed because October was at their door, and with October the first rains would come. They would have to hurry to plow the fallow.

The weather was still fine. Two or three showers toward the middle of September barely softened the parched fields. The true first rains had not come,

## OF DREAMS

the torrential rains which refresh the air, drench the earth, soak the leaves and stubble, awaken the snails, dark from their long sleep and prepare the earth for the plowing, those rains which wash the sky, the beautiful autumn sky so limpid and green over the melancholy earth. In the morning and in the evening, on the distant confines of the sea, the castles were armed, as the peasants say; that is, high in the air piles of clouds, now dark, now light, were bound in a line like chains of fantastic mountains, in spirals, in cones, in cliffs, in peaks, in precipices, in terraces suspended over the abyss. Now they sparkled in the light of the sun, and now they were veiled by the noon-day heat in a violet haze with leaden shadows like the atmosphere of the desert beaten by the simoon, and again they were inflamed by the sunset like citadels consumed by a colossal conflagration.

Those clouds were the advance guard of the coming storms. At any time now, at a signal from the Lord who rules the seasons, the black and smoky mass, ablaze with lightning, shaking the mountains with thunder, would break. And the deluge would come rushing down upon the dry and dusty country, veiling the air, swelling the torrents and carrying away the bridges.

Once the rains began, one could not tell how they

## ENOUGH

would finish. In Calabria, either the weather is dry, and you have to bring out all the saints of the churches to see a bit of water, or it rains, and, if the rain comes with the sirocco, it never lets up.

It was settled that the invasion should take place on the eve of the Madonna del Rosario, the first Saturday in October.

Friday evening Don Michelino stopped in at the tavern of Porzia Papandrea, where he held a short consultation with Galeoto and Cosenza. Afterwards he went around the village, went into every house, and read to half the world for the hundredth time, the extracts of the Crown Lands documents, encouraging and admonishing the people, dissipating doubts, and especially removing that diffidence, that fatalism, which always lays hold of the mind of the southern Italian when he is forced to take part in any public action.

That evening the weather was magnificent. In the afternoon a cool wind had swept the sky, leaving it as transparent as crystal. The stars, limpid, trembling in the infinite, seemed just then to have left the shining hands of the Lord. Tomorrow would be superb.

“God is helping us,” said the peasant. “This invasion, this act of force against injustice, is desired by Him, also, who is the God of justice.”

But the morning dawned black with threatening

## OF DREAMS

storms, doubly serious because they came from the north and not the sea. Over the wood of Verraro, whose tall cliff stood like a bulwark over the village, the sky was black. An enormous cloud stretched like a gigantic blot over the gray, uncertain sky, from Bony to the flats of the Marchesina. Aspromonte, with its sharp peak profiled in the uncertain morning light, seemed disturbed by a threat that promised a hood of snow which would not be doffed until the following April. To be sure, the edges of the big cloud were lit up by the dawn, which might mean that the threat was circumscribed, but when the clouds came from Verraro, propelled by the north wind, it was sure to rain unless the northwest wind arose to fight it.

Rocco Blèfari appeared at the door of his house and looked with a certain defiance at the threatening skies. He traced the sign of the cross on his brow. The clang of the bells shattered the air like a call to arms. It was the signal.

All over the village doors slammed, windows were thrown open, people called to one another from stairways, from landings, from the street. The awakened pigs grunted before the doors. Hens came down from their roosts and clucked around the houses in search of food. Roosters saluted the dawn from the thresholds. Men in their shirt sleeves, sleepy-eyed and uncombed, appeared and called to their neighbors, while

## ENOUGH

the women quieted the children, dressed them, put a crust of bread in their hands and shoved them out into the street. Some poured water in their hands from a pitcher held between the knees and washed their faces. Others, with the healthy morning appetite of the countryman, chewed at something while dressing. They shouted at their wives, they cursed, they slammed lids of boxes or window sashes. Women gave their babies into the care of a neighbor too old to go along, and called the hens to shut them in the houses.

Amid all the confusion, Gèsu laced his shoes and sang the *Magnificat*, as happy as a child. When he finished he went out to the landing of the stairway and called, "Aunt Caterina!"

The wife of Varvaro came to the door, brisk, gay and robust, with her hair freshly combed and drawn back from her thin old face, which resembled a guinea hen.

"We are going, then?"

"We are all going. Isn't Uncle Bruno coming?"

"Sure, I'm coming," shouted Varvaro from inside the house.

"And Mariuzza?"

Mariuzza appeared in the doorway beside her aunt. Her Madonna face, save for the vivid lips, was pale, like wax.

## OF DREAMS

"I am not coming," she said. "My uncle will take my share of the lands for me."

Meanwhile the *Ruga Grande* rang like a smithy—shouts, howls, curses, yells, children weeping and pigs grunting. Some had started for the square. From the direction of the *Murello* people from the *Guardia* continually passed. Some carried bags, come baskets, some straw sacks. Men carried sticks, hatchets or hooks, not with a definite intention to come armed, but somewhat through habit and somewhat through foresightedness. No one knew what might happen.

Passarelli, with the two *Cataldos*, father and son, stood under *Rocco*'s stairway and shouted, "*Rocco, Rocco*, are you moving or not, blood of God, or are you a coward?"

"I come, I come!" and *Rocco* appeared.

In a moment the *Blèfaris*, the *Varvaros*, and the *Cataldos* were in the street, ready to leave.

"This is the time you should wear your shoes, *Rocco*," said *Cataldo*. "Are you going to appear barefoot before His Majesty the King?"

"You are joking," answered *Rocco*. "Sooner than do that I'd give up all the *Baronali*."

"And *Pietro*, where's *Pietro*?" asked *Passarelli*.

"How should I know?" asked *Rocco* sadly. "He's been sleeping away from home for more than a month."

At that moment *Pietro* came along from the Mu-

## ENOUGH

rello, limping like a tired horse, a long stick in his hand and his jacket thrown over his shoulder.

“By San Gialormo, there he comes!” exclaimed Rocco, pointing. “Where have you been?”

“Oh, he has probably been warming the knees of Vittoria Papandrea,” laughed Passarelli. “The poor girl is cold, she has no blood.”

Pietro muttered under his breath and dropped to the rear. They set out.

“If that boy doesn’t get a hold on himself he might just as well go to America,” said Rocco, driving his enormous feet before him at the head of the procession. “He has become an imbecile, following that daughter of an evil mother. He does not understand that she has something else in her head.”

“And in her hands, too,” added Passarelli, amid general laughter.

“Are you going to be quiet? Yes, or no? Blood of . . . !” snarled Pietro in a silly voice like that of a boy at the beginning of puberty. “If I go to America I won’t even write to you, as true as the Madonna.”

“Well, don’t write, and a lot of good it will do you,” said Rocco. “I am old, but I earn my own bread. I—”

To cut short the sermon of his father, who, once he started, was worse than any preacher, Gèsu began to sing the *Dixit Dominus*.

## OF DREAMS

When they reached the square the little church was open and through the door could be seen, at the left of the altar, the pale yellow flame of the lamp of the Sacrament. The bells stormed in the agitated morning air. From every direction people flowed in, from the *Ruga Grande*, from the *Ricuso*, from the *Timpa*, from the *Valloncello*. The faces of the peasants were rugged and grim, or sad and resigned, and all bore the mark of habitual and patient suffering. The beards were scraggly, and the faces were lined with wrinkles as deep as wounds. Here and there could be seen the pendulous, bleeding lip of trachoma. Many faces bore the fiery marks of skin eruptions. Short homespun trousers with numerous, irregular patches on knees and seats gave an impression of extreme and painful poverty.

The women were numerous. Some were young, at the full flower of that short, quick blossoming of all tropical plants, which, in the south, transforms in a year or two a scrawny child into a magnificent woman. Others, still young, were worn and faded from their first childbed. Others were old, lank, hard, dried up by labor. Their faces were long, wrinkled, toothless. They seemed like monstrous fruits eaten by rot. Some, under an aggressive chin, had a little shining goitre like the rind of a pomegranate fruit. And with the adults swarmed the children—ragged, unshod, unkempt,

## ENOUGH

without coats or shirts, with uncombed hair, their faces lined by streams of dirt and their mouths spotted by the yellow of the prickly pears which they stole from the gardens. They ran among their parents' legs like demons. They shouted, howled, fought, and threw themselves on anything they could destroy.

Don Michelino Fazzolari, who for the occasion had put on a fluttering cravat in *La Vallière* fashion, was already in front of the shop of *Mastro Genio*. His brows were knit and he had the air of a condottiero who sees his troops ranged on a field of battle. And truly he was the condottiero. The mayor was but a slender reed who hardly realized what it was all about.

“Good day, Don Michelino.”

“Good day, professor.”

The peasants approached. As they greeted him they examined him, and in his erect and calm bearing they saw the ease of the man who can read and write and knows what he is about.

“We are going, then, professor,” said *Rocco*.

“You ask me that?”

“Sure I ask you, per la malogna! Isn’t it you who advised us to go?”

“And am I not here?”

“Where is the mayor?”

“He is still asleep.”

“It is a shameful thing! Call the mayor.”

## OF DREAMS

Rosa, with her bag under her apron, cast a glance at Mastro Genio's shop. On one wall there was a large placard with two figures on it showing the latest masculine style, a man with redingote and a top hat, and another in a sack suit with a stick. Beside the placard hung the guitar which the girl had heard so many times at night under her window accompanying the sweet melancholy song dedicated to her. On another wall, in the center of a rosette of illustrated post cards was the figure of a sleeping woman kissed by a cupid.

In the square the crowd grew tumultuous. It kept shouting for the mayor. Suddenly, from one corner of the square, through the street that leads to the Ricuso, there came the noisy roll of a drum followed by the blare of a trumpet. The mayor was arriving from the town hall, followed by Don Gialormo, the head of the rural police, who carried the banner of the municipality, while two guards came behind him bearing the portraits of the king and queen, nailed on two long poles. Ahead of them all was Fronte di Rocca with the drum and an old cavalry trumpet slung from one shoulder.

“Long live the King! Long live the Queen! We want our lands!”

Like a great wave the people flowed toward the mayor. The children screamed like macaws. The sound of the drum, the blare of the trumpet, the flag, and the

## ENOUGH

two pictures born aloft over the crowd before the church, amid the loud holiday ringing of the bells, kindled the souls and fancies of the people. A sort of religious frenzy invaded them before these symbols.

All the people took off their hats as though the king and queen really had appeared in the square. They waved them in the air and shouted, their faces red and eyes alight.

! “Long live the King! Long live the Queen! We want our lands.”

Some swung sticks threateningly in the air, some raised aloft their axes, gleaming wickedly in the gray of morning. When the mayor, a bit sleepy, a bit perplexed and irresolute as his nature was, saw that a great number had armed themselves with bags and baskets, he said to himself, “This is going to be a great raid.” And he saw the seriousness of the undertaking evaporate. If he had been able he would have put it off, but to propose delay with the people excited as they were, and in the presence of the blessed pictures, would be enough to get himself lynched out of hand.

Shouts came from all sides, “Long live the King! Long live the Queen!” The women threw kisses to the queen. They struck their breasts with their bunched finger tips, murmuring, “Grace, grace!” as though before a sacred image, and without knowing precisely what they were asking for.

## OF DREAMS

“How beautiful she is!”

“Is she the Montenegrin?”

“Yes, the Montenegrin.”

“Look, what is that on her head?”

“That is a crown. Is she not queen?”

“Oh, my dear, she will protect us. If she knew how matters were she would come to Pandore and see that justice was done.”

“Ah, if she knew!”

“The king, too, is beautiful, with that sash and that braid at his throat.”

“Why, he is dressed like a soldier. Has he served his time in the army?”

“Why, he was born a soldier. He is the commander-in-chief, he is.”

They shrugged their shoulders. They could not persuade themselves that the king, too, submitted to military service, which to them was a great burden.

The pictures and the flag fluttered in the fresh north wind which bore the rustle of the olives from the surrounding orchards like the murmur of the surf.

“Citizens!” cried the mayor, raising his hand to impose silence.

“Go up on the church steps,” advised Don Gialormo, “so that everyone can see you.”

He was carried up almost bodily.

“Citizens, I don’t know whether you want to go,”

## ENOUGH

he said hesitatingly, his big boyish eyes moving over the crowd. "The weather threatens—"

At his words a perplexed silence settled over the crowd, a silence of anger and alarm. Did they want to go? Why, the mayor was crazy! Don Michelino took the ball on the bounce, and waving his hat in the air, shouted as though possessed by a devil. "My friends, the mayor is afraid!"

"Keep quiet, animal!" the mayor muttered, seizing him by the arm.

"If he is afraid we will go alone."

"What is he afraid of?"

Angry shouts came from all sides. The voices were hoarse and raging, the axes were raised aloft.

"What is he afraid of, since the king and queen are with us?"

"My friends," cried Galeoto, jumping up onto a pile of stones, "I have read in a book—"

"Guerrazzi is speaking," said Don Gialormo.

"—a book that tells about King Oedipus."

Don Michelino, furious, started to leave.

The mayor, balked, distressed, tried to dominate the crowd. He understood now that it was impossible to stop the crowd, to make it abandon its intention. The die was cast. He signed to Fronte di Rocca to blow the trumpet. When he could be heard he said, with a great

## OF DREAMS

show of courage, "You want to go? Very well, let us go. I shall be the first."

A howl of joy followed his words. "Long live the King! Long live the Queen!"

"But before we leave," the mayor continued, "I must give you a piece of advice. Remember that we are not making a raid. We must touch nothing in the fields through which we pass."

Not touch anything? Evidently the mayor was still asleep. Was it, or was it not necessary to take the contested land? And to take possession they must gather fruit. Thus it was written in the Code. Cosenza had it in his hand and made an uproar against the mayor, who was revealing himself a lawyer who did not know the law. The women cackled uneasily.

The deciding word came from Don Michelino. When the mayor fell silent amid the increasing murmur of the crowd he took the floor. He rumpled his hair, he stuck the thumb of his right hand into the armhole of his vest, and he improvised a spectacular declamation.

"Pandurioti, I am sorry, but the mayor is afraid. We go to take possession of the lands of the Commune, the lands which the laws have granted us from the time of King Gioacchino, God rest his soul and good health to all of you."

## ENOUGH

“Good health and long life. Long live King Gioacchino!”

“Who was this king Gioacchino?” asked Rocco of Galeoto, who stood near him.

“He was the king they killed at Pizzo.”

“They killed him? And why?”

“Why? Because he gave lands to the poor.”

“The dogs!” exclaimed Rocco between his teeth, and he remembered that beautiful woman with the big breasts and the balances in her hand, painted on the courtroom wall at Gerace Marina. Not even kings are safe from that wanton, Justice.

Don Michelino continued. He took from his pocket his sheet of draft paper and waved it in the air like a red rag before a bull.

“These lands are ours. Our rights have been recognized by General Colletta, by the agents Grillo, Macrì and Bosurgi. Here are the documents. I do not speak idly. Paper talks. But we have never been able to enjoy these lands, and some of us have been forced to emigrate to America, to suffer and to die.” Emotion overcame him.

Sobs shook the crowd. The women wiped their eyes and noses with their aprons. Those who had relatives in America felt their hatred increase against those who had forced them to emigrate. Those who were leaving,

## OF DREAMS

or who had relatives ready to depart, placed the blame for their poverty on the usurpers.

"It is true," Rocco muttered. "My poor boys would have to go so far away, among so many dangers. Don Michelino speaks truly, blessed be the mother who gave him milk. Long live the professor!"

Don Michelino continued. "We must go, then, today, and take possession fearlessly."

"Why should we be afraid since we go with the King?"

The crowd, by this time in exaltation, moved.

Fronte di Rocca lead the procession, rolling his drum as though possessed by devils. Behind him came the mayor, with Don Gialormo beside him bearing the flag. Following them came the guards with the royal portraits, and after them a river of howling humanity. "Long live the King! Long live the Queen! We want our lands!"

They crossed through the town tumultuously, and as they advanced the crowd grew larger. Even the timid ones, at sight of the two portraits waving in the air, came out of their houses and joined, drawn like leaves by a gust of wind. Wherever a door was seen open eight or ten people rushed inside, pushed some reluctant one out into the street, and drove him into the caravan with threats. Before them the hens flut-

## ENOUGH

tered away. The pigs herded together, raised their ears and sniffed the wind before that advancing tumult, and then fled precipitously through the streets with grunts of fear. Over all the bells rang madly, while the olive trees in the orchards turned silver in the wind that came in uncertain gusts. The big cloud stretching over the wood of Verraro remained motionless and threatening, but no one paid any attention to it.

When the Pandurioti arrived at the Colle della Guardia and saw beyond the dry river bed all the lands they were about to conquer, there was a shout of joy and love. The Carruso, undulating with hills and valleys, lined by the irregular channels of the water, with scattered clumps of mastic and wild pear, rose up to the foot of the mountains where the oak trees grew, and up toward Natile, with its hedges and chestnuts. Then there were Macrolis, Angelica and Ancone to the left, with rows of olives standing out against the whiteness of the ground. Here and there a streak of dark fallow land broke the parched yellow of the stubble. A few yokes of oxen plowed, but seemed to remain motionless. The gardens of the Baronali, between the wide river bed and the first slopes of the fields, marked by the dark green of maize and the red of peppers and tomatoes, spread out before them.

This was the promised land, the good land that would give them bread and liberty! Each person ca-

## OF DREAMS

ressed with his glance his share, a corner that would become his own, and on which he would be able to work without fear and without having to share the fruit of his labor with another.

The children had passed to the head of the procession carrying branches of olive, pomegranate and elder. They advanced with loud cries, jumped over rocks, and stormed the prickly pear with a shower of stones. Before the children raced the dogs of the town, leaping with joy, breaking into furious barking at every shout of the crowd, and all the dogs of the countryside answered.

It was an indescribable spectacle. It seemed like one of those primitive migrations of nomad peoples, or a tumultuous exodus before a cataclysm.

## CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN they arrived at the edge of the river and saw the gardens of the Baronali through the flowering branches of the oleanders they broke into a run. The children went first. They ran shouting through the shrubbery, splashed through the thread of water that lined the immense river bed, scattered with mottled boulders like monster birds' eggs, and disappeared among the tamarisks. The women followed, their skirts held up to their knees to keep them dry and with their mighty ankles in view. The men followed them.

Now thoroughly excited, the mayor rushed ahead waving his arms, trying to hold them back by every means in his power. But no one listened to him. Even Fronte di Rocca, with his drum slung from his shoulder, disappeared among the oleanders.

Still on the near side of the river, the mayor, Don Michelino and the guards with the flags and portraits looked at one another helplessly.

## OF DREAMS

"I knew it would end this way," said the mayor woefully.

"I approve of their actions," said Don Michelino, lighting a cigarette. "When you get right down to it, the stuff belongs to them, after all."

The mayor, his mild eyes full of anger, turned his back.

"Now what will we do?" asked Don Gialormo, annoyed to find himself involved in such an undertaking.

"We will sit down," said the mayor. And he seated himself on a big rock in the river bed.

From across the stream came a confused noise, a succession of crashes, an ominous storming. It was as though an army of devils had attacked the gardens to destroy them. Like a plague of locusts the peasants rushed over the countryside. The first-comers, with a lust for snatching quickly, stopped at the first plants. The others followed closely and pushed them aside while they cursed and struggled. Everywhere there was the crack of breaking reeds and shrubbery trampled in mad strife. The women made bags of their skirts and threw into them in confusion peppers, tomatoes, egg plants, ears of corn. They bumped and pushed about, some of them lost their balance and tumbled down cursing, snapping off plants and crushing the fruit. They let go their skirts and the fruit fell to the ground. It was snatched up again, trampled, and fought for.

## ENOUGH

More fruit was destroyed than saved. This went on all through the field. While some broke the stalks of the corn and shoved the long ears into their bags, others rushed from one row to another tearing off ripe fruit, stem and all. Some threw big yellow squashes on their shoulders, and when they found them awkward to carry, hurled them to the ground again. Boys hunted little melons to eat, and when they found none, took pleasure in pelting one another with tomatoes. In less than half an hour the immense garden, covering one whole bank of the river for a mile, was in ruins. Not a single plant was left standing. Everywhere was a reddish pulp of trampled peppers, smashed tomatoes, broken squash, leaves and branches—a formless tangle left in the wake of the hurricane.

A few men had bags and baskets, and carried them under one arm or on the shoulder. Those who, with less foresight, had come only with their hands, tied the sleeves of their coats together with willow withes, and in this makeshift bag stuffed as much as they could. Rocco Blèfari was one of these.

Suddenly the skies grew blacker. A great uproar descended upon the land from the direction of Verraro, a minute crackling, a puff of air as though from a far-off wind. The light was hidden by a sort of smoke. The cloud settled down over the river bed, and with a

## OF DREAMS

sudden violence, the rain fell on the wrecked garden and on the scattered mob.

The mayor was sheltered under an olive tree. He had the portraits of the king and queen taken off the poles and placed back to back against the tree trunk, so that they should not be ruined. A sudden whisper spread through the garden—the carabinieri! A silence fell, broken only by the rustling of the thick-falling rain. From the direction of Ancone the tramp of horses could be heard advancing. From behind the oleanders appeared the ominous three-cornered hats of two mounted men. They looked uncertainly at the crowd scattered over the river bed or huddled under the trees, then one, who wore a marshal's insignia, drew from his holster a big revolver, pointed it at the group around the mayor, and cried, "Everybody halt in the name of the law." He dismounted, followed by his companion.

The arrival of the carabinieri acted on the crowd as does a charge of buckshot on a flock of sparrows. The mayor, Don Michelino and the guards who were under the olive tree within revolver shot, did not move. The boys disappeared among the rocks and tamarisks like a troop of monkeys. The others, especially the women, tried to escape. With their hearts in their throats, breathless, they went slinking among the trees like cats, hiding behind the oleanders, squatting behind

## ENOUGH

the boulders of the river bed, and recommending their souls to all the saints. Those who were hindered by their loads threw half of them on the ground and rushed after the rest. Others, greedier and more obstinate, hobbled along dragging after them their skirts swollen with peppers and tomatoes, which fell out at every step. A few of the men fled toward the wood of Angelica, others toward the Mulino Nuovo, following the main course of the river.

Galeoto and Cosenza, as people who had a certain familiarity with the carabinieri, and who represented the intellectual aristocracy in this plebeian horde, approached the mayor's group. Rocco approached also, perfectly at ease, strong in his belief that the king would protect him, and with his coat full of booty. He did not suspect for a moment that what he had taken was not his by sacred right.

Since Galeoto and Cosenza, more experienced and more cunning in matters of justice, had nothing on them, Rocco was the first to be seized. Barefooted, with his big head covered with its knotted handkerchief, and with his coat heavy with plunder, he was the personification of the poacher.

“Stop you!” shouted the marshal, grabbing his arm. “What have you in here?” He pulled the coat off Rocco's shoulders, and sticking his hands in the sleeves,

## OF DREAMS

pulled out two big yellow peppers. "What is this? Where did you steal it?"

"Steal? You are crazy!"

"Quiet, shoeless dog! Watch out how you talk to an officer of the law."

"Signor Brigadiere," said Rocco, "Signor Brigadiere, I have not stolen. This is an act of possession. Ask the mayor about it."

"Be silent."

"Sì, signore, an act of possession. I am not stealing. The mayor knows me. Ask him."

"Be silent, I tell you, and give me your name. What do you call yourself?"

"I call myself as my father called me," shouted Rocco, excited and scared at the same time. "This is an act of possession."

The marshal turned to his subordinate and ordered, "Handcuff him."

"Handcuff me? But, Signor Brigadiere, this in an act of possession—the Crown Lands. There is the mayor, he knows all about it. Don Michelino, bring out that paper. Show it to the Signor Brigadiere. He knows how to read. The lands belong to the Commune."

"You are under arrest," the enraged marshal yelled in his face, "because you were taken in the act of steal-

## ENOUGH

ing and with the loot on your person. Do you understand? I think you are one of the leaders, that's what I think."

"I? But, Signor Brigadiere," continued the exasperated Rocco, "I—" But the other had turned to the mayor in all his authority. The guards, as if to protect themselves against the law which appeared in all its severity, unfurled the national flag, brought forth the portraits of the royal family and grouped themselves about the mayor. Don Michelino turned over in his mind one of those answers which remain forever safely unsaid. The marshal ignored him. He spoke to the mayor in a tone of great authority.

"What are you doing with this flag?" and he reached out his hand to take it.

The mayor, for all his timidity, had recovered a bit of bravery in the authority of his position. He intervened, took the flag, and held off the officer with a friendly but dignified gesture.

"I beg your pardon, but this is the banner of the Commune, and I am the mayor." Saying this, he unbuttoned his coat and showed the tricolor sash. "If you require explanations, ask for them, but remember that you are speaking to the local representative of the king."

The marshal had orders to deal severely with the raiders, and was tempted for a moment to follow them, but the tone of the mayor, quiet and assured, and his

## OF DREAMS

position as representative of the king, which he exhibited there like a mysterious dignity and which the police officer had neither the time nor the ability to verify, intimidated him. He started to reply but became confused, and finally said, "I have been ordered, sir, to arrest all these people."

"Who gave you that stupid order?" asked the mayor.

"Pardon, signore, my orders come from the captain, the commander of the company."

"Well, that order is stupid, and you can tell your captain and the under-prefect that I said so. These people are a whole village. If there is anyone to be arrested, I am that person, for I have directed and advised the demonstration. Arrest me and let this peasant go."

"I have no orders to arrest you," answered the marshal, "but I shall take this man whom I have caught in the act."

"There seems to be no way to make you understand that you are doing a silly thing. Where is your captain?"

The captain, with the main body of the carabinieri, had remained at Ancone where the contested lands were held by a brother of the deputy and therefore required more protection.

At this moment four carabinieri who had gone in pursuit of the fugitives arrived with three of them, Fronte de Rocca with his drum on his back and a

## ENOUGH

napkin filled with peppers, Liano, and Cataldo with a bag bigger than himself.

The marshal noticed that Cosenza and Galeoto were whispering together excitedly and decided to question them.

“You are raiders, also?”

“Signor Maresciallo,” said Cosenza, “we are citizens who have come to take possession of the lands of the Commune, according to the laws abolishing feudalism. They are not in my Code,” and he drew it from his pocket, “but the professor, Don Michelino, knows where you can find them.” And he turned to Don Michelino.

“Don Michelino, have you lost your tongue? By the blood of Mahomet, bring out those laws of yours.”

“Go on, imbecile,” exclaimed Don Michelino in confusion. “What laws are you talking about?”

“Why, per la malogna, where is that paper? Bring it out. We have our rights, there are documents to prove it.”

“Certainly,” Galeoto helped him along, “show the documents.— This is treason, per la malogna!”

The conclusion of the matter was that both Cosenza and Galeoto were arrested for sedition, and taken, with the other prisoners, to Pandore.

Rocco Blèfari, bound, as he said later, like Jesus Christ, and innocent like Him, carrying on his shoulder

## OF DREAMS

his coat whose stuffed sleeves slapped against his legs, scuffled along humiliated in the midst of the carabinieri. Their white shoulder straps, their cartridge holders, the red stripes on their trousers, their big hats with the straps under their chins, reminded Rocco of the pictures of the Roman soldiers with bull-like muscles which were shown during Holy week beside the little Christ, livid and bleeding. Like that Christ he was being led before the tribunal. And justice? Ah, that beautiful woman with the rich breasts and the balances! "I always said she was a shop keeper, another Porzia Papandrea!"

## CHAPTER FIVE

THUS the retaking of the Crown Lands finished in a raid on tomatoes and ears of corn, and in the arrest of ten villagers. The carabinieri left Ancone and went to Pandore. There were eighty of them, and at their head rode a fat blond captain with the apoplectic face of a mad monk and an air that made the houses tremble.

The poor peasants, who believed they were exercising a right, became so afraid at the sight of that armed force, which seized the town hall, patrolled the streets and searched the houses, that not a single voice was heard in the town. One would have said it was deserted save that, from time to time, a thread of smoke, the weeping of a child, or the woeful grunting of a pig rose above the hum of the wind and the rattle of the water on the roofs. The rain came down in torrents, the dead and heavy rain of the sirocco. The north wind fought all day long with the northeast wind, but gave up toward the evening. Against the big cloud poised over Verraro there came from the sea other clouds, low,

## OF DREAMS

soft, gray, from which thick, cotton-like fog drifted out, skimmed over the olive groves, the houses and the hills, and veiled everything in a whirl of fine, insistent rain. The wind, which now raised and now lowered the fog, swished in the trees like a sea in storm, surrounding the town with a continuous, solid roar, which recurred like the roar of the surf. Water dripped from the houses and ran down the muddy, garbage-strewn streets. In the background, toward Ancone, the river divided into two black currents and filled the valley with its bellow, which, joined to the roar of the sea, spread through the approaching night like a mighty, invisible menace.

In the miserable houses, weighed down by their hunchback roofs mottled with lichens, the people dared not complain. Don Michelino Fazzolari had disappeared with all his documents. The mayor himself barely escaped arrest and now was shut up in his house like a scared mouse and refused to show himself for any reason. The tavern of Porzia Papandrea was deserted by the peasants. Vittoria distributed cigarettes and glasses of cognac and smiles to the officers of the law who hung around bandying words with the hearty, flourishing girl, who seemed ready to challenge the whole company. Mastro Genio's shop was closed.

The prisoners were shut up in the council room of

## ENOUGH

the town hall, along with the evidence. On the council bench, shaped like a horse shoe, lay the bag taken from Cataldo, a few baskets, and a separate pile, the peppers found in Rocco's coat.

A kerosene lamp, with its smoky chimney, lit the surroundings dimly. The portraits of the king and queen were hung on the walls again. The flag stood in the corner, and, still wet with rain, seemed like the standard of a defeated army. Seated on the magistrates' chairs the prisoners looked at one another in terror, doubting the reality of what had happened to them so enormous it seemed. They talked of it, but in whispers, because the carabinieri were outside.

Rocco, seated in the center with his checkered handkerchief still on his head and his muddy feet on the mayor's footstool, divided his attention between his companions in misfortune and his own troubled thoughts.

"They have arrested me as a thief. Look, Mahomet, how sorely I am tried! I had to arrive at sixty years of age to be arrested as a thief! Gesú, Giuseppe e Maria! So I am a thief and a ringleader! And I did not even want to go along, because I know what that good lady, Justice, can cook up. Had it not been for those rascally sons of mine, who always threaten to go to America, I should never have moved. I, a thief? I have always worked hard and I know that the Lord was thinking

## OF DREAMS

of me when He said 'Thou shalt earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow.' " But what exasperated him more than anything else was that the carabinieri had arrested him without considering his reasons. The act of possession, the laws of King Gioacchino, the documents of Don Michelino—all had proved useless. "The marshal was deaf. And what a man, that marshal! He did not pay the slightest attention to the presence of the king and queen. But was it possible that the documents were false, and that the mayor and Don Michelino had deceived the whole town? If they were not false, how did it come about that the magistrates had sent such a great force to prevent the citizens from exercising their rights?" His thoughts became tangled. He doubted everything—justice, the authorities, the government, everything seemed false, precarious, useless. He was a poor, ignorant peasant who could not reason for himself because he could neither read nor write, and everyone deceived him. A great discomfort invaded his soul, the discomfort of man face to face with injustice. He felt himself oppressed by a great loneliness, the loneliness of the ignorant man who sees in every authority a trap, and hates all authority.

Galeoto ground his teeth together and threatened to let a hole into the belly of the mayor and Don Michelino, who, according to him, were responsible for everything.

## ENOUGH

Cosenza, stretched out on a table near the light, leafed over his Code laboriously and in the effort to see the print in the dim light made weird grimaces. Now and then he raised his shaggy head, scratched the beard under his chin, and muttered, "I told him so. It wasn't that article at all."

The next day, although the rain had not stopped for a moment, and the winds still raged furiously, whitening the olive trees like breaking billows, and hissing madly on the houses, the prisoners were led away. To shelter themselves from the rain some of them had bags sent from home, or one of those woven covers with the warp made of broom straws and the woof of rags, which in Calabria are called *pezzare*. Rocco's daughter, Giusa, brought him a pilgrim's cloak. Rosa, with her brother Gèsu, had fled to Grappidà, to a little farm belonging to the Varvaros. Pietro took to the woods. Giusa was left alone to whimper, and came to bring her father the cloak and something to eat, in spite of her great fear of the police. When she arrived at the town hall she went up to one of the two carabinieri who stood on guard in the shelter of the doorway.

He looked at her with a certain something in his eye which frightened her strangely. Her green fustian

## OF DREAMS

skirt was pulled over her head as a hood, and as she held the hem tight under her chin with one damp hand, she showed a thin face, a bit sickly, with cheeks colored a pale rose, gentle eyes, greenish as though they reflected the color of the grass, and big white teeth like those of Bedouin women.

“I should like to give this coat to my father.”

“Willingly, bella ragazza,” said the carabiniere, caressing her with his eyes. “Give it to me. What is your father’s name?”

“Rocco Blèfari is his name.”

“Give it to me—give it to me.”

“But can’t I see him?” asked the girl in a tearful voice.

“I am sorry, but I have no orders, signorina.”

“I should like to give him something to eat, too, for his journey.” She showed him a napkin in which she had placed two hard boiled eggs, a piece of bread and some cheese.

“Give it to me, I’ll take it to him.”

“When will they take him away?”

“Any moment now.”

“Then I will wait, for I want to see him,” said the girl, dropping her eyes.

She descended the stairs and retired into a corner at the entrance to the postoffice. Other women waited there, crying. Galeoto’s wife, with wild eyes, cursed

## ENOUGH

like a Turk, and beside the wife of Cataldo, Cosenza's wife, a poor, slow-witted woman dripping with rain and tears, trembled with fright.

When the prisoners filed out, their hair all rumbled, unshaven, and with dark rings under their eyes from lack of sleep, and with handcuffs at their wrists, the women burst into bitter weeping.

Giusa went up to her father, but she did not embrace him for fear of the police.

“Father, have courage,” she said, sobbing, and threw the cloak over his shoulders. Then she placed the napkin in his hand and watched him as he moved off with the other prisoners in the slanting rain, bent over, his big bare feet sloshing in the mud.

Under the cloak could be seen the swollen sleeves of his coat, in which had been placed again the plunder of the Baronali, the sign of the act of possession of the citizen, Rocco Blèfari, in the Crown Lands of his Commune.

## CHAPTER SIX

FOR two weeks it rained in torrents with the stormy sirocco that came from the sea and battled all day long with the west wind. Gusts came and went, swishing among the trees with a scattered hissing, rattling on the roofs that dripped a monotonous and slothful stream. The air was thick with low clouds, with curtains of soft fog, thick and warm, which sped along on the wind, frayed out in the tips of the trees, wrapped itself around the church steeple, and then lost itself in the open country. Scarcely anyone went out. In the deserted streets some few women, with heads muffled in hoods, passed at a run. A few pigs grunted sadly before a door. In the melancholy gardens, with their olive trees always in motion and whitened and rumpled by the rain, the prickly pears in files along the piles of stones like spectres, the hedges of elder already green with new shoots, flocks of goldfinches flew by during the lulls. They rested a moment on the hedges and then flew away with their characteristic jerky flight.

## ENOUGH

At times the horizon widened, the fog appeared to hide in the thickets, and a dim light spread over the countryside as far as the sea. An island of sun appeared over the waters like a distant smile amid the surging of the billows, breaking in the open sea. Ash-colored clouds reflected a pale rose, and they marched toward the west like an army bearing its threat elsewhere. In the intermittent light the hills stood out, limpid, pale, lined with valleys, rough with rocks and clumps of shrubbery, and with a few yellow pear trees like gigantic bunches of flowers suddenly opened in the solitary country. There appeared here and there, brown and distinct amid the dry stubble, a few rectangles of fallow land, or a garden or two still green. The dark mass of the oaks alternated with the changing silvery gray of the olives.

Everything dripped water, sad, with dark blue, almost violet reflections like the color of death in those first autumn days amid the scattered murmur of waterfalls and the heavy voice of the torrents.

In the depths of the valley the river, swollen and muddy, roared, and in its voice there was an undertone of rolling stones. At its mouth the water was yellow. Beyond the river could be seen the Crown Lands, quiet, washed by the rain, sad. To the right, above Natile, where the tree-covered mountain had an indigo color, Pietra di Febo, Pietra Longa and Castello Atí with its

## OF DREAMS

sharp point could be seen. Beyond these, on a background of storm-colored sky, the tips of the Appenines appeared in profile: Scaparrone, Farnia, pale with stubble and heather, and higher than all, Aspromonte, with its ever-white hood of snow. And the clouds seemed to journey toward the mountains in an immense migration.

But these were the small truces of the sirocco.

Little by little small clouds of fog rose into the air from the river courses, from the edges of the ravines and from the valleys. Others formed over the oak groves like the frozen breath of a giant. They came thinly at first, then spread, broke, multiplied, and united in a thick cloud that suddenly blotted out the horizon. Light grew dim, the sky closed over, the wind became stormier and the water came, minute, insistent, hurling against the faces of the houses, the windows of the balconies, the foliage of the trees.

The eaves dripped, and the hearts of the people closed in, like the horizon.

One night, amid the furious blowing of the sirocco, dull rumblings like those of landslides were heard around the village.

At Grappidà, whence they had fled from the police, the Varvaros and Mariuzza were seated that evening

## ENOUGH

around the fireplace where a great log of mastic burned, saying the Rosary. Caterina was leading, and according to the custom of the village, instead of the usual Mysteries, recited certain poetical compositions of popular invention.

*Vi saluto monachissa  
di Gesù figghiola e matri  
chi piacisti all'eterno patri  
e vi fici principissa,  
vi saluto monachissa.  
Dio vi salvi a voi Regina,  
o Maria, Rosa divina.*

*Pater noster.*

Bruno and Mariuzza answered in a subdued whisper, the latter letting the beads of coral glass run slowly through her fingers. Bruno stretched his dry, nervous hands toward the flame, which flickered at every breath and made the shadows waver on the bare walls.

The wind blew with an unheard of violence. A few oaks, some fifty paces from the house, twisted and crackled as though swept with fire. The house groaned in a sinister undertone, and from the tiles of the roof came strange noises, as if the frame of the house was slowly changing position under some mysterious pressure.

## OF DREAMS

They were at the third mystery when a dull, subterranean rumble shook the house. It was followed by a great cracking and crashing of falling branches. The door blew open violently, almost torn from its hinges. The wind rushed in, humid with dust-laden rain. It blew out the light and assailed the worshipers.

“Maria Santissima!”

They jumped to their feet and clutched at one another, their eyes bulging.

Through the open door they saw confusedly a livid countryside, with branches of trees agitated by the tempest and a black sky covered with monstrous storm clouds. In the roaring immensity came flashes of lightning, rapid, far-off, whose thunder could not be heard.

“What is it, uncle?” asked Mariuzza, her face white.

“I don’t know,” Bruno Varvaro replied, “I think an oak tree fell.” He approached the threshold. A black, moving mass was stretched out a few steps from the house. The biggest oak had been uprooted and overthrown by the wind. Some of the branches had been snapped off and lay on the ground in a dark tangle, and others still shook desperately in the wind.

“The big oak has fallen,” said Varvaro. The women begged him to come in and close the door, but he did not answer. He looked around in the darkness, broken by a dim gleam that came from behind the thickening clouds, and scarcely believed his eyes. Something

## ENOUGH

mysterious was happening around him and seemed slowly to be changing the face of the earth. That landscape, of which he knew every shrub, almost every rock, in which he could have moved with closed eyes, was being transformed before him. Another oak was bent over on one side and creaked like a boat about to founder. Around it other trees seemed to bow in great arcs. The branches of some touched the ground. A stone wall which ran parallel to the house now appeared somewhat to the left and all hunched over.

“Whatever is happening, Vergine Santissima?” Varvaro rubbed his eyes. “Am I drunk with smoke, or is this the flood?”

From other houses came excited voices, long shouts of fear, weeping, and in the darkness reddish lights moved like agitated firebrands. The lowing of cattle and barking of dogs came from every side.

“Gesú Maria, what is happening tonight?” Varvaro was saying, when he heard behind the house a shrill cry, a youthful voice.

“Focu meu!”

A boy rushed up, his hair on end and in his hand a smoking torch almost extinguished by the water.

“Varvaro, Varvaro, where are you?”

“Here I am. What’s the matter? Who are you?”

“The son of the widow Rocca. Our house has fallen down. Come and see, for God’s sake come and see.”

## OF DREAMS

“What do you mean, it is fallen? With the wind? Has the roof fallen in?”

“No, no,” panted the boy, “the walls have opened and it seems to be walking.”

Varvaro’s house, too, seemed to be walking and settling. The ground before the door, which normally was as high as the sill, now was a good handbreadth higher. And the creaking of the roof became louder. Suddenly the old man had a feeling of immediate danger, a sort of instinctive warning. He seized the women and pushed them hurriedly outside.

“Caterina, Mariuzza, outside! The house is falling.”

They had barely time to get through the door when a great crash came. The walls opened like a too-full pomegranate, and swallowed the roof.

“Focu meu! Focu meu!” cried the women, weeping aloud, filled with terror. “Vergine Maria, Madonna di Polsi, pardon, pity.”

The son of the widow Rocca stood shrieking, his eyes rolling in fear, his clothes soaking, and with the dead firebrand in his hand. From the darkness the howling of the dogs came louder and madder.

Where were they to go? They sank to their ankles in the wet ground. Varvaro crossed himself continually. He was unable to realize what was happening in the stormy night, with the wind that seemed to be combing out the mountains. The countryside could

## ENOUGH

be seen only in confused flashes. An immense, confused roaring of waters filled the night, and amid the fury a strange moving of the ground could be felt, as if the earth was changing position, was being pulled down by that tempestuous storm, with all its trees, its houses, its roads, into a final chaos.

“Come to my mother,” begged the boy. “Come, for God’s sake.”

The women threw their skirts over their heads and followed Bruno and the boy, breathless, reciting prayers. They held hands, stumbling through mud that came to their knees. At every step they saw more clearly the marks of the cataclysm that was transforming the country around them. The stone walls, which served as boundaries, were either knocked down or twisted. Some of the trees were buried in earth half-way up their trunks and others were bent as though carried away by a stream of mud. A path which led across the fields had changed its position at one place, and at another had disappeared entirely. All these things filled the Varvaros with a mad terror, the terror of man face to face with the unknown, the mysterious force of nature which he cannot dominate, but which dominates him and crushes him.

They found the widow before a straw hut. She seemed stupefied with fear. In her arms she held a three-year old child wrapped in her dead husband’s

## OF DREAMS

coat. Two other children curled up in the darkness of the hut whimpered, with chattering teeth. Nearby stood the house, with great cracks in its walls and the roof tumbled in.

“Oh, Varvaro,” wept the widow, “what is it? Is it the end of the world?”

“I don’t know, cara mia, I don’t know,” answered the old man. “My house, too, has fallen.”

“Come inside here,” said the widow. “This, at least, will not fall in on our heads.”

They all went in. The two children continued to cry softly in the darkness. Mariuzza went to them, groping with her hands stretched out in the darkness, forgetting her own fear. She found the tearful faces and drew them to her with a sweet maternal gesture and pressed them to her breast, her thoughts far away.

When dawn came there was promise of a clear sky. The clouds were scattered and diaphanous, and they slowly abandoned the line of the shore. As it grew lighter they spread out, letting bits of blue show through. Finally the sun rose, set them on fire, broke them up into great wandering islands, and drove them back over the mountains.

The glistening morning revealed a desolated countryside. All the houses, the olive presses and the sheds had fallen or sunk into the ground, walls were torn apart and roofs fallen or about to fall. The trees had

## ENOUGH

either been torn up by the fury of the wind or had sunk into the ground. The whole land was upset, here tumbled into the torrents, there cracked and open in sudden landslides. Boundary posts were overturned, roads had disappeared or had changed location, valleys were swallowed up, farms were submerged. From the foot of the rock of Verraro an immense landslide had torn loose all the ground for five kilometres. The whole country was confused and devastated.

More sorrow and ruin.

The poor dear land of the Pandurioti did not give bread! Like an ant hill on the edge of a wagon track, continually disturbed by the horses, by the wheels, by urchins, it forced its inhabitants to make over their nest periodically, to start anew at every season. It was as uncertain in its soil and in the works which man built thereon as it was uncertain in its winds.

They would have to leave it. They would have to seek elsewhere the means for a life less sorrowful and less distressing.

They would have to emigrate.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

FOLLOWING so closely the disillusionment suffered in the affair of the Crown Lands, the ruin caused by the landslide put a great discomfort in the souls of the Pandurioti. About fifty families had been driven to the town by the disaster, without bread and without a roof.

The time of the fall planting approached and the Pandurioti had not sown a handful of grain. The proprietors of the contested lands refused to receive the citizens of the Commune, not even through an act of submission. A gentleman from Platí kicked a poor devil off his property when he went to ask pardon. The lands were granted for sowing to people from San Luca, from Benestare, and from other neighboring towns, and the guards were ordered to prevent the Pandurioti even from passing through.

It was an unbearable situation. Talk of America revived. By the first of November, through pressure brought to bear by the mayor, the ten prisoners were sent back home, and when Rocco Blèfari returned to

## ENOUGH

his family he found his sons had completed their preparations to emigrate. He no longer opposed them. Now even the good God, by his punishment, seemed to be forcing people to abandon their poor village.

"What the Lord wills, will happen," said Rocco with a heavy heart. "Let us commend ourselves to Him."

More than forty were leaving at once, a real mass migration; the sons of Rocco, Cataldo and his son, Peppe Liano, Mastro Genio, the son of Passarelli, Galeoto, and many others. Even the widow Rocca was sending her boy, a child, who, although he was sixteen years old, seemed but twelve, so small and thin he was.

Before leaving Mastro Genio decided to marry Rosa. The marriage was celebrated on the eve of his departure. These half barbaric, half heroic marriages are not infrequent in Calabria. The husband and wife swear faith to one another, spend a night together, sanctify with the intimate and blood-stained rite the union of soul and of body, and on the following day, as in the ancient fables of heroes and knights errant, the man leaves, sometimes never to return, on his search for bread, toward the immense and flashing

## OF DREAMS

battle front of labor. The woman remains alone with her memories and with the thrill of a happiness barely tasted on the edge of the cup of youth.

Although Mastro Genio made great efforts to do the thing in grand style, the marriage ceremony was melancholy.

Only when evening fell did the young men who were leaving dance and play love songs on their pipes, as if to deaden their feelings and to drown the anxieties which the thought of departure into the unknown stirred up in their thoughts.

While the dancing was at its height, Peppe Liano, who was the cheeriest of all, took Giusa by the arm and drew her outside under the wall of a tumble-down church.

“What do you want?” she asked, awed by the boldness of this man whom she loved with a love full of fear and uneasiness.

“Tonight you will be alone,” he said in her ear, with his breath warm and full of the sharp scent of wine. “I shall come to see you.”

“What do you mean . . . ? Where . . . ?” asked Giusa, bewildered. “Are you crazy?”

“Quiet, little chicken,” said Liano. After a rapid glance around him he kissed her firmly on the mouth.

## ENOUGH

“Don’t talk—wait for me. Leave the door open, the little door behind the house.”

“No . . . no . . . I won’t,” she murmured. He dominated her with his handsome, savage eyes. As he made to leave she seized him by the coat. He took her by the arms, and holding them tight as though in a vise, he kissed her again.

“I shall come—wait for me.” And he returned to the dancing.

Giusa remained alone, leaning breathless against the wall, while from the house came the song of the pipes and the tinkling of the Basque tambourine which marked the rhythm of the dance.

The night was already dark, and a few bats streaked the twilight with their irregular flight. In the sky toward the west was a great light. The sun had set and now the heavens had taken on a green-gold color which was dazzling above the mountain tops. Some few stars trembled low on the horizon like corollas of waterlilies on a stream of tranquil water. In the orchards the strife of sparrows had ceased and only the olive trees still whispered in the breeze, whitening at every breath as if they wished to hold on their leaves a little bit of the fading light.

At dawn of the following day the bells rang out to

## OF DREAMS

announce the mass of the emigrants. They and their families wished to entrust to God their fortunes, to confide in Him their fears, and to beseech His benediction on their journey.

The little church slowly filled with people. Through four high windows in the upper part of the central nave which looked toward the east there entered the still uncertain and pallid light of a dull day. The painted figures in the old pictures on the ceiling began to emerge. In one, representing the Massacre of the Innocents could be seen the sandal of a soldier pressing the face of an infant into the ground, the arm and dagger of another soldier raised over a confusion of female bodies, and the maddened face of a woman whom another had seized by her long blond hair as she defended her child by driving her nails into her assailant's eyes. Another pictured the marriage of Mary. At the head of the stairway of the temple stood the high priest with his moon-shaped mitre, and at the bottom was the Madonna, whose shoulders and beautiful head alone could be seen. From the walls of the nave the four Evangelists looked down.

In the back of the church, under the pyramid-shaped cupola in which a few tiny round windows were barely revealed by the dim light, arose the beautiful marble altar, an altar that would have graced even a big church, with its brass candlesticks between fans

## ENOUGH

of artificial metallic flowers throwing out a mystic gleam, as from a perennial and precious flowering, such as is fitting for the garden and the altar of the Lord. At the right the lamp of the Sacrament shone thin and dim.

While Mastro Ciccio, the sacristan, passed in front of the altar to set up the reading desk, open the Missal and lay down the Ampullae, the women entered silently, with rosaries knotted around their fingers and their bare hands on their breasts. They moved aside the benches and seats as they made their way to their accustomed places. They kneeled, crossed themselves hastily, and began to whisper their prayers. Little by little the great left nave was filled. Some of the young women wore on their heads woolen shawls worked with flowers, but many, especially among the peasant class, wore cloths tied over their heads, with beautiful borders, which in dialect they call '*ndirosu*'. This cloth, a couple of metres long, usually white, but black for those in mourning, is fashioned with simple and graceful folds in such a way that it frames the face in a rectangle, the sides of which project downward over the shoulders and sides, covering the back down to the hips.

When the third bell rang the church was white with these cloths, under which shone sad and reddened eyes, eyes with black pupils and mottled irises,

## OF DREAMS

which make southern women fascinating even when they lack beauty.

But the young and beautiful ones were few. Youth is so short a season for the Calabrian women. Many of those youthful faces seemed shriveled up and worn. The beauty was still visible, but veiled under suffering and sorrow—that daily sorrow and suffering which comes from intense and servile labor, from poverty and incessant fatigue of child-bearing. The young women whose husbands were emigrating could be recognized by their sleepless, tearful eyes, and by the bitter anguish on their faces. A few held children in their arms. Some held them lifted to their breasts like an offering of love and sorrow to God.

Among them were the daughters of Blèfari. For Rosa, dressed in her wedding garments, a chair had been brought, and she sat all sad and weeping between her sister Giusa and her future sister-in-law, Mariuzza. Giusa was on her knees, her eyes burning and frightened, as though they feared to be surprised any moment in fault. Mariuzza, too, was on her knees, all thin and white, with her pretty, pale lips, and her slender neck that rose like the stem of a flower in the whiteness of its headdress, and appeared to support with difficulty that great crown of tresses which was wound around her head.

In the back of the church near the baptismal font

## ENOUGH

was the widow Rocca, dressed in rags. She held her youngest child in her arms, and beside her sat two other children, wrapped in big coats covered with patches. Her face was wan and sharp, although her cheeks, covered with little moles, had a still-youthful curve. As she prayed her eyes burned with unshed tears. Her boy, too, was emigrating. A child barely sixteen, why, she still had to wash his ears and comb his hair! "What will he do, all alone in that unknown country among strange people?" She invoked the soul of her poor husband, and recommended her son to him with a burning faith, as if he were alive and could hear her. She asked that he might accompany his son and sustain him in distant lands.

In the other nave, near the pulpit, under the organ beside the font of Holy water, the men assembled. Rocco was one of the first to enter. He crossed himself and dropped to his knees beside the font. When the bell announced the beginning of the mass the forty emigrants entered in a body with a great trampling of new shoes and stopped between the pulpit and the choir, in front of a big cupboard in which the statue of Saint Vitus was enclosed.

They all wore new suits, mostly of fustian of an awkward and angular cut, raised and sticking out in front like a cuirass. Some wore ready-tied cotton neckties with the hooks sticking out in the back above the col-

## OF DREAMS

lars of their coats. Many wore only shirts with collars turned over and fastened with glass buttons and the fronts embroidered with branches of trees, crowns of rays or little flowers with a hole in the center and petals all around like marguerites. The embroideries were done by the fiancées. Several wore wedding shirts. And all these queer ornaments, these new suits freshly ironed, lumpy, not yet settled to the body, had for the women and families of these emigrants the beauty and austerity of war-time smartness.

Their faces, even those of the youngest, were angular, with lines strongly marked, as though caused by a precocious old age. All the eyes were sad, wild, and at the same time timorous, eyes as used to sorrow and daily suffering as to the light of day.

Giusa sought Liano with her eyes in the group of emigrants, but he, swaggering, a bit gloomy, his forelock hanging in his eyes, and wearing a new suit of velvet, did not look her way.

The priest entered from the sacristy and advanced to the altar with the chalice in his hand. He bowed and ascended the altar steps rapidly. He set down the chalice, leafed over the Missal for a moment, and descended to begin mass.

A whispering noise arose at the altar. A blue hanging which covered a niche in the center moved, lifted to one side, and suddenly, amid the lighted candles

## ENOUGH

and fans of shining flowers appeared a Madonna, beautiful, serene, merciful—the Madonna of Pandore, with the Babe erect on her knees.

There was a chorus of groans, of sighs, of prayers, soon interrupted by the first notes of the organ. Mastro Genio, with his sharp high voice as shrill as a cockerel, intoned the *Kyrie*. Immediately his voice was joined by the beautiful tenor of Gèsu Blèfari, with melancholy inflexions, all flourishes, embellishments and variations, as if he wished to adorn the religious hymn with all the graces of a love song.

At the sound of his voice Mariuzza leaned her hands on the back of the chair in front of her, bowed her head on her hands, and wept.

Notwithstanding the happiness of the song in the little church a tragic sense of expectancy weighed heavy over all, a tragic sense of great calamity. Hopes and fears, tears and prayers, secret invocations and ardent vows rose to God in sad confusion. The Pandurioti were gathered in that church which recalled to them the most beautiful, the gayest, and the saddest events of their lives, as in a place of peace and of hope. It represented for them the only place of spiritual elevation, the one spot on earth where the dolorous animal life of every day found truce in prayer and song, where their hearts looked in upon themselves, saw their

## OF DREAMS

wounds, and with an intense faith, showed them to God. The daily pain of body and soul found comfort within those four walls, among the venerable images of saints, before the altar which spoke of another life and bound the things of the earth to all the beauty and poetry that surrounded them—heaven with its aspect of infinity and of grace, and the sun, and the clouds, and the winds, and the stars—all the things nearest to God. To the church they came with their domestic troubles, whenever misfortune befell the family, whenever the threatening earth trembled, and whenever the weather was unpropitious for the crops. They went to implore bread for the body, and unknowingly they found bread for the soul. With all their faith and with all their hope they came there now, after sad disillusionment and disaster had left so many of them homeless. Now, when their children, their husbands, their brothers, their living flesh were about to leave for an unknown land in search of work and bread, they came. Was it not the will of the Lord? Everything proceeded from Him, and to Him they came to entrust themselves utterly to His mercy.

When mass was over the priest recited the litany of the saints, then gave them his blessing and returned to the sacristy. Then Palamara, an old peasant woman with a formidable voice, intoned the *Salve Regina*. The

## ENOUGH

intermediary had disappeared. The people spoke directly with God, and invoked the Protectress of the poor and of the afflicted.

*Dio vi salvi, o Regina,  
siete matre universale;  
per vostro amor si sale  
in Paradiso.*

The voice of the old woman was joined by the shrill soprano of the younger women and the deep voices of the men, until a perfect chorus with harmonies of thirds and fifths filled the church.

The first two verses were sung hastily in a subdued, salient recitative, a passioned invocation. At the third the song spread like a flock of doves that have taken flight, and dipped with semi-tone harmonies, slow, heart-breaking in the last hemistich, full of a conscious melancholy, strong and resigned.

The voices of the young women opened out full and limpid from their breasts like a jet of spring water, the older women sung in a minor tone. Some wept as they sang, their hearts filled with anguish.

High up in the church the big windows tinkled, shaken by gusts of the west wind, and through them

## OF DREAMS

the clouds could be seen continually passing through the morning sky. On the altar all the candles were extinguished. Only the lamp in *cornu epistulae* shone with its slender, yellow light.

*Voi siete gioia e riso  
di tutti i tribolati,  
di tutti i disperati  
unica speme.*

What sorrow and resignation was in that song! They abandoned themselves to it voluptuously, as one abandons oneself to tears for relief, tasting their bitter aroma. Forty men were leaving their homes, their wives, their sweethearts, their children, to go to a distant, unknown land, among people who spoke another language, in search of work and of bread. Need, the poverty of their land, drove them into exile as the first snows on the mountains had driven the robins to the plain, gentle birds that chirped as they hopped through the hedges or flew over the tops of the leafless trees with little lamenting cries that increased the sadness of approaching winter. Some of those who were leaving would never come back, would fall far away in the struggle for existence, buried in some mine or cut down by the terrible machines in the great work-

## ENOUGH

shops. The kiss they would give their weeping wives would be the last, and on All Souls' day their loved ones, in memory of them, would gaze into the mysterious distances of the horizon.

And how many of them would return whole in body and soul? How many would find bread, how many fortune? And what would happen to their families? On their return would they find those whom they had left behind? Would their women keep faith, and would their sweethearts be waiting for them on their return, with the sweet trepidation of constant love? Everything was entrusted to hope and to faith in that God Whom the winds and the tempests obey, Who, as he rules the seasons, rules the hearts of men and their fate.

In that hymn there was not only the sadness of exile, the sorrow of parting. Prostrate in prayer, the people forgot, little by little, unconsciously, the difficulties and adversities of daily life, the needs and the wretchedness that abased their souls. Their sorrow widened and grew deeper.

As when a stone falls in tranquil water, the circles widen until they embrace all its surface, so from the narrowness of their personal troubles their sorrows spread until they embraced something of the sorrow of all men, and took on a universal meaning.

## OF DREAMS

*A voi sospira e geme,  
il nostro afflitto cuore  
in un mare di dolore  
e di amarezza.*

Ah yes, not only were their lives troubled, but all the life of the world was a sea of sorrow. Over man's whole being weighed heavy that mysterious sadness which constitutes its inmost essence, and which seems to come directly from God.

The hymn grew heartbreaking and solemn. Many of the men who were wont to sing that invocation to the Virgin felt now for the first time that it was a true cry from the heart, and a supreme comfort dissipated little by little their bitterness, and a serene calm opened before their souls, like an aurora.

Rocco Blèfari, leaning against the font, joined in the chorus in a whisper lest his agony should give a tone of desolation to the hymn. His heart was black—black! It told him that his children would not find fortune, but would be conquered in the struggle. He did not know why he felt thus, but the voice spoke within him as the voice of a shipwreck in tempest, and in the sea of sorrow and bitterness he felt himself lost. He turned his humble, supplicating eyes, filled with tears and bitter experiences, to the Madonna who

## ENOUGH

looked down from her niche, and he murmured,  
“Blessed Madonna, help them.”

When the chorus intoned the last verse:

*Noi siamo figli vostri  
a noi date vittoria,*

all the young emigrants rose to their feet like warriors who hear the blare of the trumpets, and faith and hope shone in their eyes. They left the church reluctantly, signing themselves with little crosses traced on their foreheads with their right thumbs, sent a kiss of devotion to the Madonna, and trooped toward home.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

PIETRO BLEFARI entered Porzia's tavern. He had never dared to put into words his passion for the beautiful Vittoria. But now, at the moment of setting out on such a long journey whose sole object was his consuming love, he suddenly took courage.

Vittoria stood at the counter, all fresh and ruddy. In the back of the shop sat Bruno Ceravolo, smoking a clay pipe.

"What's up, Pietro?" asked Vittoria, happy to see him. "How handsome you are, dressed like a galantuomo."

Pietro reddened and looked at his suit and his shoes in embarrassment. His big body, bony like an old horse, unbeautifully clothed in the suit of gray fustian all stuffed out in front and in the sleeves, looked like one of those scarecrows the peasants use in the fields.

"Pfu!" he said, passing a hand rapidly over his clothes. "I shall dress better when I get to America."

"You are leaving, then?"

## ENOUGH

"Yes, I am leaving. I have come to say good-bye. Keep well," and he held out his big hand, knotty like a giant's.

"Have a good trip, Pietro, and remember us sometimes."

Pietro felt cold at the roots of his hair, but he took a deep breath and said, "Remember you? I shall certainly remember you, . . . but . . . I want to tell you something, I . . . Where is your mother? I'll tell her."

"Tell it to me, Pietro," said the girl, laughing to see him so embarrassed and stammering.

"No, I'll go and see your mother."

Porzia was in the back room belching like a cataract and Pietro went around the counter toward the green curtain. Bruno, after he passed through, frowned at Vittoria.

"You are amusing yourself, huh? You are amusing yourself, you little hussy."

"And what do you want, you?" said Vittoria, with her damp, provoking smile.

"I've had him on my stomach for a long time, that maccherone without a hole! You think I didn't know about him, squatted on that barrel every night like a sheep, with his eyes staring? It's a good thing he is going away."

"He is younger than you are," said Vittoria.

## OF DREAMS

Bruno jumped. "I'll out-smoke you, and him, too—*capisci?*" He got up suddenly and he, also, went into the back room.

Pietro found Porzia stretched out on a chair, corsetless and in hysterics.

"I've come to say good-bye," he said, all excitement.

"Ah, you are leaving, too, beloved son," said Porzia, and she emitted another formidable belch. "You, too, are going to America? With the benediction of God! May the Madonna accompany you and give you good fortune."

"I wanted . . ." Pietro stammered, "I wanted . . . to . . . to tell you something. I want Vittoria for my wife . . . if I may be so honored."

"Ah, my son, it's an honor and a pleasure . . . an honor and a pleasure . . . But why didn't your father come? It is the grown-ups who ask these questions, my son. As far as I am concerned, if she wants you I am willing. Try to make a fortune in America, and when you come back . . ." She shouted, "Vittoria, Vittoria, come here a minute."

Vittoria came. "Here I am, mother."

"Do you hear what Pietro says? He asks for you in marriage. What do you say?"

Vittoria kept her joking smile, chiefly because she counted on exciting the jealousy of Bruno.

## ENOUGH

“I am very happy,” she said, swinging her hips, “providing he goes to America and makes a fortune.”

“Give me your word on it,” said Pietro, holding out his big hand again, red in the face and with his heart turning somersaults in his breast.

The girl put her hand in his without knowing exactly whether she wished to take a pledge or to annoy Bruno. Pietro, all upset, took it, pressed it roughly, and went out.

“Pietro! Oh, Pietro!” called Vittoria, running after him, “I want to give you a remembrance. Here!” and she handed him a package of Macedonia cigarettes. “When you smoke them think of me.”

“I will,” said Pietro, and not for all the world would he have told her that he did not smoke. “Good-bye, good-bye.” He took the cigarettes and went out into the street. As he turned into the square he heard hurried steps behind him. He stopped and turned, to find Bruno facing him.

“Listen,” he said, “let what you’ve told Porzia be as if not said. Go to America, by all means, but forget that you ever spoke as you have spoken. That girl is not for you.”

“What’s that to you?” asked the young man. “Is she, perhaps, your daughter?”

“That is a matter which does not concern you. I tell you once more that she is not for you.”

## OF DREAMS

They glared at one another for a moment, like two cocks ready for battle, then they separated in a threatening silence.

Gèsu was saying farewell to his sweetheart.

Aunt Caterina Varvaro had prepared a bundle of food for him, a piece of cheese, a bun and some pomegranates. "You will eat this in the train," she said.

Gèsu was happy. With his kind, ascetic face barely covered with down on the jaws and upper lip, with his hazel eyes and big listless body, he had the air of a sacristan. He embraced and kissed his Aunt Caterina and his uncle Bruno fondly, then turned to Mariuzza.

She had on the same dress she had worn at mass, a blouse of light-colored wool with a heart-shaped decoration of blue sateen on the front, and a muslin skirt with narrow pleats, tight at the waist and bellshaped at the bottom. Her little breast was supported by a *stecca*, a strip of soft, curved wood, often carved by the giver, which fitted into a sheath in the middle of the corset in front. Around her neck she wore a little gold cross of filigree work hung on a black cord, and in her ears rosettes with garnets in the center. Her beautiful, oval, child-like face seemed bloodless, and in it shone two great, clear eyes, the color of the sands covered by

## ENOUGH

a thin veil of water. On her temple was a little scar of a boil cured by fire.

“Good-bye,” said Gèsu, holding her hand, for the custom of the village permitted nothing else. “Keep well. If God gives me health and good luck we shall meet again. If not . . .”

Mariuzza felt two big tears run down her cheeks, but she was not ashamed. There were spots of color in her cheeks and the hand he held trembled.

“Buon viaggio,” she said. “May the Signore and the Madonna go with you and give you fortune, as my heart desires.” Then she added, her head slanted a bit over one shoulder, “Write soon, and remember us.”

Still holding hands they stood a moment in silence, moved, looking at the ground. In him was a desire and in her a hope which they did not dare to show.

“Kiss her,” said Bruno Varvaro suddenly. “Kiss her, and God bless you.”

Gèsu opened his arms and pressed the girl gently to him, kissing her on the cheeks like a sister. She returned his kiss, her face flushing. They looked a moment into each other’s eyes, then Gèsu went rapidly down the street to meet the other emigrants of the *Ruga Grande*. A few minutes later the caravan was on the move in the *Strada Nuova*.

The sky was covered with gray clouds, and the west wind rustled in the olive trees.

## OF DREAMS

Each man had a cloth bag filled with clothing and food. Many of the men and women of their families followed them. Some of the wives carried the bags on their heads while the husbands held a child in their arms whom they kissed repeatedly. Some of the older children, barefoot, ragged, walked with short steps beside their parents. They were filled with wonder at this departure and tried to find out what it meant by asking a thousand curious questions.

Among the women was Rosa Blèfari, who accompanied her husband to the station. Rocco, also, was going to Bovalino, and although the road was long, he loaded his sons' bundles on his head to save them their strength. Peppe Liano was the most joyful of all. He played a mouth organ and made everybody laugh.

“You know what Pietro was singing?” asked Liano. “We were all singing ‘God give us victory,’ but he was thinking about himself. I heard him sing ‘God give me Vittoria.’” Even Pietro laughed.

When they arrived at the bridge of Fontanella they all turned to wave a last farewell to their village, that pile of houses on a hill, among gardens and olive groves, with the blue and white mountain in the background. Each sought and found his own house, looked again at the little windows half open, with a vase of marjoram or a ginger plant on the sill and with a branch of prickly pear on the side, and a terra cotta

## ENOUGH

pitcher hung from a nail on the balcony. Ah, their poor houses, how they would remember them, even at the ends of the world!

At Guidace the Strada Nuova took a long turn around the hills of Bony. The emigrants took a short cut and prepared to say farewell to their loved ones.

It was a sorrowful scene. The women hung sobbing on their husbands' necks. Mothers, their faces bathed in tears, held up their children to be kissed by the fathers, whose eyes were swollen and red. Some of the children clung to the legs of their fathers and cried bitterly. The wife of Cosenza sat down on a mile stone and lamented with a funereal hymn, as if she were weeping for the dead.

Farewell—write—give us news—my dear—my son, were the words that were heard amid the sobs.

Giusa Blèfari embraced her brothers and sought out Liano with her eyes. But he was already far ahead, playing his mouth organ. The poor girl felt a sudden faintness sweep over her. "Oh wretched me, he has no heart, that man, no heart."

At the last moment there came running the son of the widow Rocca, a mere boy, thin, with gentle eyes and a brave face scattered with little black moles like his mother's. Following him came the widow herself, panting, carrying her baby in her arms, her two other children beside her. The older wore a coat that had be-

## OF DREAMS

longed to his father, all tattered and blowing in the wind.

“Wait for me,—wait for me,” called the little emigrant, holding his bundle tight under his arm, and with a half loaf of bread sticking out of the pocket of his coat.

The emigrants stopped. “Forward, *ereboya*,” said Nino Sperlí. “In America you will have to be nimble.”

When the boy embraced his mother he wept like a little child, hitting his head desperately on her breast.

“My son, my beloved son,” the widow said, caressing him and kissing him on the eyes, on the face, on the mouth, and bathing him with tears, “May the soul of your father go with you. Friend Nino, you who know America, I commend him to you, on the souls of your dead. You, friend Gèsu, write his letters for him. My poor orphan son, my beloved son, beloved by all the drops of milk I have given you, may the Signore and the Madonna accompany you.”

“Come, come,” called the emigrants. “Forward, courage! You, comare, be at peace. He shall be as a son to us; do not worry.”

His little brothers did not want him to leave.

“Come home quickly, Nando,” said the older, waving his ragged coat. “Come home soon, for Christmas.”

“Yes, yes,” answered the little emigrant, “I shall bring you some hazel nuts and an almond cake.”

## ENOUGH

They went. When they entered the olive grove of Guidace a song arose. In the chorus were heard the robust voice of Peppe Liano, the sharp, thin voice of Mastro Genio, and the softer tones of Gèsu Blèfari. It was a song of love.

*O chi spartenza dolurusa e amara,  
chi pianginu li petri di la via.*

## PART TWO



## CHAPTER I

**A**FTER the departure of his sons, Rocco Blèfari remained no longer in Pandore. The village seemed deserted to him, funereal. Almost every house had its emigrant, and whenever neighbors met there were questions, sighs, tears. "Has yours written?—They must have arrived by now. I wonder where they are this minute.—Perhaps they are in the open sea. And is the sea calm?" Their thoughts were always yonder, lost in the mysterious, infinite void of that journey whose direction, even, they did not know. To what corner of the horizon should they send their thoughts and their hearts so that they might accompany their flesh and blood, traveling far away to unknown fortune?

The anguish of these thoughts, constantly and implacably gnawing at their hearts, matched the vagueness of the notions which these poor country people had of America, of the sea, of the distances, of the ship, of the work that their loved ones would do, and of the men who would be their companions. Where was this

## ENOUGH

America, this endless land, to arrive in which they had to stay eight days between heaven and sea? Where was this country of fabulous distances, with cities as big as a province, with immense houses, with a harbor that had no end, where there was a bridge that they called the bridge of Brooklyn, with trains running on the top and boats underneath, and where there was a statue of the Madonna as tall as a fir tree whom they called Liberty? Where was this strange world and on what point of the horizon did it lie?

However much Rocco looked around him he could get no idea of it. About him everything was small and beautiful, somewhat arid and sad in certain spots, to be sure, but all lighted by a resplendent sun under a heavenly sky which, during certain hours of the day, appeared to be painted.

But the sea, great, infinite, tempestuous, with waves as high as mountains—he could not imagine it. His sea was a blue streak hung between Cape Zefirio and the point of Roccella, like a marvelous curtain of shining satin, now wrinkled and varied by little white flowers of foam, now covered by graceful wavy lines, lacquer-colored. That sea was lovely, calm, definite, with its voices, with its angers and with its clouds. His sea, which on certain August afternoons took on the color of violet and the softness of velvet under a solemn and vaporless sky, was certainly not a sea to suggest to

## OF DREAMS

him the idea of infinity and storm. The thought of the sea was for him a familiar thought. It had a tranquil, solemn, almost religious strength. It was, with the sky, the place where God walked, where He sent His storms and the weather that favored or ruined the crops. It had nothing of that immensity and threat of which the emigrants spoke. Even the ships that crossed his sea were small. From the door of his hut of stones and brush at Bony he had seen, so many times, the ships which crossed his sea. They seemed like toys. They were but little rectangles, little dark lines on the immense dazzle of the water, so low that the funnels rose above the water scarcely bigger than those notches he made on a stick of wood to compute his days of work. They crept along as slowly as a grub on a leaf, sometimes surmounted by a plume of smoke that slowly melted into the blue of the water. At other times there were sailing vessels of which one could see little but the large, triangular sail. Again the boats traveled with all their sails swollen in the wind and, at evening, the sails took on a slight orange tint in the rays of the setting sun and looked like big butterflies hovering over a hay field.

That was his sea, and he could not conceive of any other.

He spent a great part of the day sitting at his door dreaming, his eyes vacant, his hands on his knees, his

## ENOUGH

thoughts lost on the far horizon. Winter had come. The pear trees had lost all their yellow leaves. All the trees were bare save the olives which glistened in the sun. Aspromonte was white with snow. The plowed fields were black on the slopes, and here and there an orchard, its orange trees loaded with fruit, broke the monotony of the countryside. The days were warm, almost like spring, in the hours when the wind fell, and robins chirped in the hedges. A few bumble bees hummed about the prickly pears. Over all rested an immense serenity. At certain hours of the day the calm was broken by a sharp, distant whistle, followed by a dull rumble that echoed and re-echoed in the valleys. It was the train passing over the bridge at Bovalino. Rocco watched its slow advance, also like a grub on a leaf, followed it as it entered the bridge and as it left it, until he saw it creep into the distant tunnel at Capo Spartivento. That train, journeying like his children, gave him a feeling of the mystery of far off places.

Sometimes at night, after a storm, a pile of dark clouds grew dense far out over the sea. Behind them came the incessant flash of lightning. At times the heavens, filled with purest stars, were illuminated by a great blaze of light which showed up the whole vast curtain of the clouds like a colossal fire. At other times the dark isles of cloud were striped with long zig-zags

## OF DREAMS

of blue flame like fiery whip lashes cracked over the sea by a horde of devils. And the whole scene gave the impression of a giant smithy in full blast, in which Cyclops beat with a huge hammer on incandescent metals as he forged the gates of dawn or the golden balconies of sunset.

Rocco thought of his sons and seemed to see them behind those clouds, panting, sweating, surrounded by sparks and clamor, as they, too, beat incandescent iron and fed furnaces that roared like the sea. Tears came to his eyes but did not fall. A knot tightened in his throat as if a crust of bread were stuck in it and would go neither up nor down. He did not try to conquer his anguish, but tasted it to the full. It seemed that the bitterness relieved him.

One evening while he was bedding down his old donkey in the poor shed of reeds and tamarisk boughs which he had prepared for it beside his own hut, he heard a noise like the squeaking of a colossal pulley, high up where the clouds passed by. He raised his head. The sky was a clear crystal, with the blue that makes the waters deep, but from the northwest soft clouds advanced slowly, like islands floating on a stream. Sudden little gusts of winds stirred the olives, making a scattered murmur that died in the silence of the fields.

That distant clangorous noise came from above. He

## ENOUGH

had heard it before, but he could not remember where or when. From behind one of the clouds came the point of a black triangle, clearly outlined in the blue. It advanced slowly, freed itself little by little from the cloud, and finally Rocco saw it clearly. It was followed by another, and at some distance, between the cloud and the earth, came a long black line, precise as though traced on paper.

It was the cranes. They advanced in perfect symmetry and threw into the clear air their lugubrious cries that seemed to accentuate the melancholy and the distances. From time to time a little movement could be seen at the tip of a triangle. The bird at the apex gave up its place to another, and their flight continued toward the infinite blue of the horizon.

They were migratory birds, driven by the cold from unknown lands to unknown lands! Perhaps they no longer found food in their own land, or perhaps their nests had been destroyed by tempests, and so they banded together, examined the skies, rose in flight, and now traveled lamenting toward their destiny under that limpid immensity while God comforted them and guided them to other shores.

“Like my children,” said Rocco, weeping. “Like my children!”

The cloud divided, took on a tint of rose, then disappeared in the subtile woof of thin vapors, like a

## OF DREAMS

thread from a spider's web. The cranes flew on with the saddening harshness of their cries. As they went toward the mountains their voices grew fainter, and the distance between one triangle and the other became indistinct, until they were but little specks in unending space. Slowly, little by little, unnoticeably they disappeared while Rocco watched the sky and thought he saw them still.

## CHAPTER II

TOWARDS the middle of December the first news arrived from America. For many days, at mail time, the relatives of the emigrants crowded in front of the postoffice, waiting. Finally one evening the clerk smilingly handed to Rosa Blèfari an oblong yellow envelope with the wavy lines of the cancellation stamp in the corner. All the women crowded around her.

"Rosa, please, open it," they begged in chorus. "Let us see if it speaks of our loved ones—if it names them, at least."

"Are you crazy?" asked Rosa, putting the letter in her bosom. "Don Michelino must open it."

In Calabria a relationship of trust is established between an agent, one who can read and write, and the family of an emigrant, by virtue of which he becomes the confidant of the family and the depositary of all its secrets, and woe to him who replaces him, even provisionally. According to the custom of the town, Rosa had chosen as her confidant Don Michelino, who

## OF DREAMS

was such a great friend of Mastro Genio, and she would have considered it a great wrong to have anyone but him read her letter for her.

“But look, you have received news,” murmured the women, somewhat vexed. “Your husband can write, but our men have to find a clerk to write for them, and even have to pay him, maybe.”

A noisy protest was rising against Rosa when the postal clerk, a former marshal of the carabinieri, shouted from within, “There are letters for everybody, Sant’ Annaspa! There are letters for everybody. Here you are—Anna Garreffa, Domenico Carrà, Rosa Linarello—” and he distributed the letters amid a shower of tears and thanks. “God bless you, God reward you.” The clerk went on, “Francesca Cataldo, Giuseppe Mantica, Rocco Blèfari.”

Giusa had come in Rocco’s place. She stretched out her hand, took the letter, and remained, waiting. Near her stood Liano’s aunt. “Serafina Liano,” called the clerk, and handed out the usual yellow envelope.

Giusa’s heart quickened. Instinctively she, too, stretched out her hand, then turned red as fire. She approached the old lady and said, trembling, “He has written to you?”

“Yes, yes, he has written to me,” answered the old lady, and with a hostile glance she hid the letter and hobbled away to seek someone to read it to her.

## ENOUGH

That evening Rocco came down from Bony, and in his house, before the fire, in the presence of the Varvaros and Mariuzza, Gèsu's letter was read. It said:

*"Dear father and dear sisters,*

*I am writing this letter to you to tell you the excellent state of my good health, with the help of God, as also the good health of my brother and of all our friends, which we are all together and immediately got work. Well, then, dear father and dear sisters, we are working in a big gang and we are in a great country making a railroad and have found some friends from Calabria, from Bovalino and from Natile, and our boss is from Ardore and is called Marando, and he is an excellent person. Well then, dear father and dear sisters, do not be worried about us, for we are well, with the help of God and the Virgin of Polsi, which this year I want you to go and take her fifty lire for me and for my brother Pietro, because we have arrived safely into this other world. Well then, dear father, we are not in New Yorka, for as soon as we landed at the Batteria they took us to the country here, which is two days train journey from the city, and you write with the envelope which I send you, because the letters go to the Banca Tocci which is a bona banca taliana and it will send them to us wherever we are working.*

## OF DREAMS

*Well then, dear father and dear sisters, we can tell you nothing of this land because we are in the country and we do our own washing on Sunday and cannot go to the city. Only I tell you that America is a land so big that you cannot give yourself an idea of it, and it is a land different from ours, where there are great riches, but when you don't find work there are woes. Here in America, dear father, there are no figs or the prickly pears of Bony, here if you don't work you die of hunger, and gold runs here like water runs at home when it rains with the sirocco.*

*Well then, dear father and dear sisters, we left our home land to come and make our fortunes here with the help of God, and we immediately began to work, but our hearts are always with our people, and if God gives us health, when we have earned a little money we will return home, for every bird longs for its own nest.*

*And I tell you, my dear father, that these lands are very far away, and we feel lost when we think of our dear families and sweethearts, whom we salute from the bottom of our heart. Well then, dear father, I must tell you that my brother-in-law, Genio, is not with us because he got a job in a restaurant and is very well and earns more than we do. And I must also tell you that my sister Giusa's sweetheart, Peppe Liano, is not with us either, and we don't know where he is,*

## ENOUGH

*because you know that he has always been a little crazy.*

*Now I tell you that for Christmas we hope to be able to send you a little money to celebrate the feast of the Holy Child with joy.*

*Now, dear father, I pass to the greetings, and I greet first of all my sweetheart Mariuzza, and I greet her truly from my heart, along with her uncle and her aunt, and please tell her that soon I will write her a long letter, and tell her to remember her promise as I always remember her, and even when I am working I think of her all the time, so that I seem to have her in front of my eyes, and I hope with the help of God to come and make her my wife.*

*My brother Pietro greets Vittoria Papandrea and also her mother, Porzia, and begs you to take his greetings to them in person."*

There followed a long list of greetings for all their friends, listed with name and surname as in a legal document, and then the letter concluded:

*"Well then, dear father, I beg you to answer me quickly and to give me all the news. Tell me how the sowing is going, whether the wild pear I grafted at Bony has flourished and whether this year you still intend to prune the American wild vines in the nurs-*

## OF DREAMS

*ery, and tell me also how our poor old she-ass is. Finally, we greet our dear sisters with a thousand and a thousand embraces, and to you, dear father, we kiss your hand and ask your holy blessing."*

As Mariuzza knew how to read a little, having gone to school for a couple of years, it was she who read the letter, stumbling, mutilating the words, and after every period she made a long commentary and a wide interpretation. A great oak log burned on the fire. The light came from a bracket lamp, one of those which the gypsies make out of iron junk. Rocco Blèfari, his hands and his big feet, cracked and spotted with yellow mud, stretched out to the flames, listened with his heart opening and closing at every sentence like the flower of a sensitive plant. Mariuzza spelled out the words with her face very red but as happy as a child.

When the letter was finished all their eyes were filled with tears. Only Giusa did not weep. She was bewildered. Of her sweetheart they had only a vague bit of news, and not a happy one. He had left all his companions and had gone alone to seek work, a prey to his adventurous and aggressive spirit. Where was he? What was he doing? Did he remember her?

In a word, all the emigrants were accounted for.

## ENOUGH

They worked digging ditches, or in factories, or cutting down trees. One, even, was a gooseherd. All that they knew of Mastro Genio was that he was working and earning money. Rosa refused to tell anybody anything.

At Christmas several sent money home. Then they found out that Liano was working in a coal mine in Massachusetts. He seldom wrote, even to his aunt. About the first of January he sent a short, dry little letter to Giusa, in which he told her, with a certain impudence, that he was alone, that he was making a lot of money and that now and then he remembered his friends. In this brief statement was all the remembrance he kept of her. Her heart was breaking with sorrow, although she gave no outward sign. The constant restraint, the effort to keep back her tears and to dissimulate her inner turmoil, gave her face a strange, disturbed expression.

Winter passed and Easter came, falling that year about the first of April. The families of the emigrants were at peace. They received letters regularly every two weeks. Many of the emigrants had already sent home several hundred lire, and even the widow Rocca's boy sent four hundred at one time, earned at his job of *ereboya*.

## OF DREAMS

The weather was already fine. The warmth of spring comforted and renewed the earth. The fields were covered with exuberant and flowering verdure. In the gardens the fave beans peeked out from their leaves. The stone walls were covered with nettles and calamint and bindweed and dandelions. In the grain, which seemed to lengthen with the blowing of the wind, the flaming poppies opened and the beautiful rose-colored lilies of the palmelle. All the roads, the banks of the ditches, the sides of the streets, the paths, the tiles on the roofs, the eaves, the ruins of the old houses, the corners of the church and the top of the steeple were covered with yellow daisies, wallflowers and dandelions.

Everything, under that warm and strengthening sun, acquired a new sweetness and a special transparency. A scent of youth and a feeling of happiness spread over the fields, perfumed the air and made it intoxicating.

Easter Sunday passed joyfully, but toward evening the news spread rapidly that Liano was dead. He had been crushed to death in the gallery of the coal mine.

The peace of Easter was broken by loud cries and weeping, weeping for the dead. Those who had loved ones in America wept as if it had been their own who had gone. Those who had no relatives there appeared in the streets, gathered in groups around the women

## ENOUGH

who wept and found fault with them, bringing forth a thousand arguments to calm them. The weeping women struck their faces, their claw-like hands bringing streams of blood. They beat their knees with their hands and raised a dirge in which they lamented the fate of their men, forced by need to abandon their homes to find food for their children.

“Sventura mia, I told him so. I told him not to leave and God would help us just the same. But he went, for the love of his children he went, to give bread to these innocent ones, my poor orphans.”

“Are you crazy?” the women asked in chorus. “Will you stop it? Because it is bad luck. Will you weep him when he is alive, stupid that you are?” They stretched out their hands as though to strike.

The children, seeing their mothers weeping, began to cry with them.

When Peppe Liano’s aunt learned the news she tottered as though she were drunk, then ran into her nephew’s forge, squatted down on her thighs, and began to beat her head against the wall. He was all she had in the world. He had been left an orphan when he was very small and she had raised him. And now he was gone.

“Oh, my son, my son,” she murmured, “my poor orphan!” and she tore her hair and scratched at her wrinkled face, her eyes veiled with tears and age.

## OF DREAMS

“How did he die, oh my dear God, how did he die?” the women asked. “What does the letter say?”

“He died crushed to death, poor orphan, in a coal mine.”

“What are these coal mines?”

“They are mountains. . . .”

“And why did he go under them?”

“He was working, unfortunate son of his mother, and the mountain fell on him.”

“He died like a rat, under a pile of rocks, crushed to death. . . .”

“Perhaps they weren’t even able to pull him out and he stayed in the ground like a worm.”

“Nobody helped him, poor wretch. Alone, without even a requiem, he went to the other world.”

“Be silent, be silent. . . . His father and his mother must have helped him. The Signore certainly sent them to close his eyes.”

“The earth closed his eyes, poor lad. What an ugly death! What an ugly death!”

Someone heard them talking of coal mines and corrected them.

“You know what coal mines are? They are wells in the ground, and sometimes they take fire and explode.”

The women were horrified. They tried to picture

## ENOUGH

that horrible death in the center of the earth, in the middle of fire, like a damned soul.

When Giusa heard of it it was as though lightning struck her. Her eyes and throat dried up, a circle of iron seemed to press on her forehead, and within that circle her brain felt red hot. All the rest of the day she remained in a stupor, moving mechanically through the house under the uneasy eyes of her father, who was heavy-hearted when he thought of his sons. But when night fell the tension of her nerves eased somewhat, her terrible grief melted in tears, and she wept desperately and long, with little cries, like a child who has been beaten. She was filled with fear, devastated. She was seized by an irresistible need of freeing her heart, of disencumbering it of an anguish which, had she suppressed it longer, would have destroyed her.

“Will you stop it or not?” her father shouted. “Have you no shame? Was he, perhaps, your husband? He is dead. Very well, may he rest in peace. After all, he wasn’t so much. A good boy, a fine workman, but . . . headstrong. Didn’t he bring this death on himself? Why, he went looking for it. Why didn’t he stay with your brothers? Nossignore! He has to go off by himself, leave his friends, and work in a coal mine. Coal! Does one joke with coal? Didn’t he know that coal dust is like gunpowder and therefore dangerous? When it explodes mountains fly into the air like clods.

## OF DREAMS

He went looking for his death himself. Now you keep quiet. You've wept some, you like him—I've nothing to say against it, it's natural, that's the way the Lord made the world. But now it's enough, for it isn't fitting for people to see you weep as though he had been your husband. Do you understand? Don't make me lose my patience, otherwise, per la malogna, I'll get up and beat you with the flat of my axe."

At his anger Giusa softened her lament a little, but then took it up again unconsciously, irresistibly forced to tears by the despair in her heart. Could she tell her father the true reason for her anguish? She shuddered at the thought, and a desire swept over her to disappear, to die, to destroy herself before the truth could be found out.

Rocco soon fell asleep, stretched out, according to his custom, on a rag mat which covered the low stone seat near the hearth. Giusa remained in the dark of her room, sitting on a chest. Through the cracks of the little window and of the door that gave on the street she saw the pale gleam of a crescent moon. The night was tranquil, a warm, still night of April. The horned owl sang already in the olive trees, and his cry, short and soft like the note of a reed pipe, sweetened the immense lunar serenity.

The night brought back memories to Giusa. It was the evening of the marriage of her sister Rosa. Her

## ENOUGH

brothers sang to the bagpipe and her father, a little drunk with wine, snored noisily on the low wall. She trembled, sitting on the chest as she sat now, her heart swelling with desire and with fear. The sound of the bagpipes, the nuptial perfume that hung heavy in the house with the odor of the feast, of the rosolio and of the sweets, and the thought of her sister, who, more fortunate than she, at that very hour rested her head on her husband's breast, disturbed her madly. She did not wish to leave the door open, but she yielded to a strange temptation, to the seduction of all these things that disturbed her and made her face burn. But God was her witness that she had no thought of doing wrong. He would come, he would embrace her, would press her to his heart in his strong arms, in which she abandoned herself with so much shyness, and then he would go away, leaving her shaken, palpitating and tired. Tired and happy.

But instead . . .

She heard again the barely noticeable sound of his steps, the slight noise of the opening door, and his heavy breathing. In the darkness she saw again his burning eyes like those of a wolf violating a sheep-fold. They sat down on the chest trembling, holding hands, kissing each other wordlessly, attentive to the beating of their hearts which seemed to fill the room. Nearby was the bed. Oh, Vergine Santa! Why did they

## OF DREAMS

lean against it? He who at first caressed her gently now seized her brutally, and his breath smelted of wine and tobacco. She tried to defend herself, to push him away. But her hands fell inert, she had no more strength. She had a mad fear of making a noise. She feared even the sound of his breathing, his breathing that was filled with a bewildering desire that tired her like a poison blown into her mouth.

When she found herself alone again, convulsed, she threw herself on the bed like a wounded bird. She no longer had the strength to lift a hand. What had been done was irreparable. Supreme joy and supreme fear possessed her. If death had come then she would not have cared. If love were not stronger than death, her life would soon finish.

## CHAPTER III

WHEN Rocco arose at dawn Giusa still wept, a weak, subdued complaint, like a childish invocation, "Oh, mamma—mamma mia!" He opened the door muttering, gave a glance at the sky already invaded by the glimmer of dawn and then went angrily to the door of the room where Giusa whimpered and ordered, "Get up."

Giusa, hunched up in a ball on the chest, raised her tear-distorted face for a moment, but did not move. Rocco threw himself upon her, seized her by the arms, and shook her violently, threateningly, "Shameless one, you weep as though you had been his wench! Have you no decency?" and he raised his hand to strike her.

Giusa fell on her knees and raising two desperate, swollen eyes to her father's face, she cried, "Pardon me, my father—pardon me and bless me, I am lost."

Rocco stepped away from her, horrified by her words. He did not know why, but he sensed in them

## OF DREAMS

a mysterious meaning, the voice of a grief different from what he had thought.

“Have you gone crazy?” he asked. “You wretched girl, what is the matter with you? I’ll cut off your head, as true as God’s sun—I’ll cut your throat like a sheep!”

Shaken by a tremendous fury, he snatched up the axe from a corner near the door and shook it savagely over the girl’s head, not so much to strike her as to reveal to her his terrible, paternal anger.

“Are there no more men in the world, disgraziata, that you must weep for a stranger as though you had gone to bed with him?”

“Oh, my father,” cried Giusa, her voice hoarse with inward distress, “I do not weep merely for him.” Her eyes filled again with fear and shame.

“Why do you weep then—why?” raged the old man, filled with a terrible presentiment of what he was about to hear. “Why do you weep, svergognata?”

“Why do I weep?” She rose swiftly on her knees, pushed out her breast and her belly before her. “Why do I weep? Can you not see how it is with me?” A wave of anger blotted out for a moment her feeling of shame, that her father should force her to reveal to him what he ought to have seen for himself.

Rocco cast the axe from him. He fully expected the earth to open under his feet. He wanted to say some-

## ENOUGH

thing but could not, and with his hands at his throat as if to ward off suffocation, he began to wander through the house, moaning in little gurgles, like the death rattle of a wounded beast. “Oh—oh—oh!”

Then rage conquered him. With one leap he was beside his daughter. He grabbed up his axe again and brandished it in the air with a resolute and terrible gesture. “Well,” he shouted, “my house has lacked bread but it has never lacked honor.” His voice broke. “You—you have dishonored my house. You have thrown your shame in my face—in the face of your father, a poor old man who suffered so much to raise you that his feet have become as hard as bronze running around the country. You have done this thing in my house! You have thrown your shame in the face of your brothers, who will no longer dare to return home lest the people laugh at them. Very well, I will kill you. Ask pardon from God now—now—for you and for the creature you carry with you—and cross your arms on your breast. I am going to kill you.”

Giusa listened with her eyes dilated and terror-filled. “Yes, yes, kill me, you are right,” she whispered, hunched on the ground, resigned. “May God have mercy on me and on my child! But first, my father, give me your blessing. I am not worthy of it, but how do you expect the Lord to pardon me if I go to the other world without my father’s blessing?”

## OF DREAMS

At the height of his fury, his eyes heavy with the weight of tears, the terrible, despairing tears of old people, Rocco raised his axe. A scream rang out. Through the doorway came the slight figure of Mariuzza. "Misericordia, what are you doing?"

Rocco turned his head. "Go away, go away! Leave me alone—leave my house!" He pushed her through the door, but Mariuzza resisted him with a courage of which she did not know herself capable, although her heart pounded in her breast.

"I tell you, you are insane," she cried at him. "Put down that axe." And she seized it by the handle.

"Let me be, I must kill her!"

Drawn by the disturbance, Caterina Varvaro entered the house, and seeing the girl and Rocco struggling for the axe shouted at them. Giusa lay crumpled up on the floor with her head in her hands, sobbing.

"Mariuzza—Rocco—what are you doing?"

With a sudden burst of strength, Mariuzza tore the axe from Rocco's hands and dropped to her knees by the weeping girl. Tenderly she tried to raise her head.

His arms dangling at his sides, his mouth agape, Rocco went and sat down by the hearth. Sobbing and drying his eyes with the back of his hand, he told Caterina of his daughter's disgrace.

"My family is lost—we are ruined. We may as well all go and hide. If he were alive, that wretch, he could

## ENOUGH

make reparation. I should force him to, old as I am. But he is dead, and now who will take this girl, with her child? God has punished him, making him die like a rat without even a requiem. But we, are we not punished also?"

"Oh, God, what a misfortune! Oh, God, what a misfortune!" Caterina repeated the words over and over.

"I shall send her away from my house," Rocco continued. "Let her go out into the world, far away from my eyes. Let me never see her shame again before me. Go—go out of my house!" he yelled. "Let me never hear your name again! Out! Out of my house!"

Between sobs Giusa told Mariuzza the terrible truth. She was astounded. It seemed a monstrous thing, and just at first she felt herself shrinking from her friend. But against this feeling there arose immediately another, deeper, full of pity and understanding for this sad maternity.

"I tell you, grandissimo diavolo, you shall not send her away." Mariuzza defied him. She felt emotion grip her by the throat. "She is your daughter, and she is more unfortunate than guilty. Where do you expect her to go, in her condition?"

Rocco raged like a maniac. He hit his head with his fists, sighed, and repeated like a refrain, "My poor, dis-honored house! My poor house! My sons will never

## OF DREAMS

come again to Pandore. And why should they come—to see their shame? A sister, whom they considered as a flower in a vase! They will never come again to this house. I, if God will heed my prayer, shall die. And the grass will grow before my door. Oh! Oh! Poor me!"

Caterina looked here and there, uncertain, disturbed, uneasy, like one who has something to say, but hesitates, who wants to suggest a remedy but fears lest it be worse than the disease. But since Rocco continued to rave and lament the lost honor of his house, she hesitated no longer.

"After all, it isn't Giusa who brings the worst dishonor on your house."

"And who, then, brings it?" asked Rocco, as if stupefied in his anguish.

"Everybody knows it but you. The worst dishonor has been brought by your other daughter, the ungrateful hussy, who has a husband in America and shuts herself up at home every day with Don Michelino, writing letters, as if she had the correspondence of the bishop."

"What do you say?" Rocco asked her. "What are you talking about?"

"Your daughter, I'm talking about. Your daughter, who walks around with shoes and stockings and rings

## ENOUGH

on her fingers. You are in the country all day. You don't talk with anybody. But everybody knows it—the town is full of it."

"She, too," groaned Rocco. "She, too?" He steadied himself against the wall.

So this was how America brought its fruits! He always thought it would be like this. His two daughters, the ones whom he called the banners of his house, were lost. Now it would be the boys' turn.

A cold and tragic resignation replaced in his soul the first outburst of furious rage. His house had been shaken to its foundations. His honor, his only wealth, handed down through the generations from father to son, sacred and solemn as the memory of his ancestors —his honor, which had been the chief ornament of the women who had borne his name, existed no longer. And fate had disposed things in a way to make impossible either reparation or the traditional vendetta which washed the shame in blood and restored it.

## CHAPTER IV

THE scandal spread through the village like a flash, gathering embellishments and details by the way. Many letters left for America, more than one to the address of Mastro Genio, to inform him of his wife's conduct.

When Rocco's sons heard of it they left their work immediately. They had no definite destination. They wished only to get away where they would meet no one from home. Eventually they arrived in a little village in Pennsylvania and shut themselves up in a room to write to their father. There, with paper in front of them and their thoughts on home they looked at each other in silence and wept like children.

Then Gèsu wrote their letter, a letter that caught at the heart. They grieved with their father over the misfortune which had struck their house in the most jealous of its possessions, honor. They begged him, however, not to abandon Giusa, who had been a mother to all of them, since, poor girl, she should be considered more unfortunate than guilty. As for Rosa,

## ENOUGH

they did not wish to hear any more about her. As for a vendetta, it was no longer their concern. Rosa had a husband to whom they had given her as a flower. Then let him see to vengeance. As for them, they erased her from their lives. Even if she died they did not wish to be informed of it.

Since rather unpleasant reports were current among the emigrants regarding the life led by Mastro Genio, Pietro went to see his brother-in-law, partly to learn for himself the truth of the gossip, and partly to urge him to return to Italy to punish his guilty wife.

He found him in a little café kept by an elderly Calabrian woman from Catanzaro. It was one of those combination restaurants and rooming-houses which the emigrants call *storo*, where Italian workmen find food and bed. Mastro Genio had grown as fat as a capon in a hen-coop, with the repulsive face of the idler. At first he had taken a job there as waiter, then he became the lover of the padrona, who kept him shut up as she did the worms in the cheese. His only task was to strum the guitar to amuse the customers and to accompany their songs.

Pietro found him seated behind the counter beside the padrona, playing and singing. The *storo* was a room filled with small iron tables, some of them with marble tops. They were occupied by workmen drinking beer and eating. The padrona was a woman of

## OF DREAMS

about fifty, energetic, dark, and with an angular face covered with little blemishes like the spots of lichens that form on damp rocks. Her hands were like those of a harpy and were marked with thick, violet veins. The gold that loaded her down at neck and wrists gave her the appearance of a barbaric queen. She listened to Mastro Genio with an air that was sentimental and yet reserved.

Mastro Genio saw Pietro enter and he tried to disimulate the annoyance the visit caused him. He got up, held out his hand, and accompanied him to a little marble-topped table in a corner. "Sit down," he said. Then he went to the counter, placed his guitar in the corner, and returned to the table with a bottle of beer and two glasses.

Pietro refused the drink and began to speak his mind to his brother-in-law, a hard, ingenuous frown on his face revealing the seriousness with which he considered everything. Finally he demanded that Mastro Genio should return to Italy immediately and wreak ruthless vengeance. He promised money for the trip if he did not have enough. Mastro Genio shook his head, and then he replied shortly that he was too well off where he was and that he had no intention of returning to Italy, where, after all, he had no feuds to carry on.

"You left my sister, who is your wife," exclaimed

## ENOUGH

Pietro, clamping his jaws together as if he were grinding Mastro Genio between them. "What do you intend to do about my sister?"

"Your sister? I don't know."

"We gave her to you honorably. . . ."

"Yes, we can see the fine sort of honor you gave me! You gave her to me for a night—and I used her. Now I give her back."

Pietro, already angry to find him so fat and tranquil in spite of the terrible offense against his honor, now went blind with rage. He seized the marble top of the table in his enormous hands, upsetting the bottle and glasses, and would certainly have broken it over Mastro Genio's head if a group of workmen, attracted by the shouts of the padrona, had not surrounded and disarmed him.

The woman squealed and squealed. "Help! Police! Call the *pulisi!* Murder!" There was an infernal hubbub.

"You scoundrel!" roared Pietro, loosing himself like a giant, with shakes of his big body that sent two men at a time rolling on the floor. "You scoundrel! So you used my sister. Perhaps she came from a foundling hospital like you who do not know who your father is!"

Mastro Genio, as white as a rag in the wash, trembled. His lips were livid with fear. He wiped the cold

## OF DREAMS

sweat from his forehead and hid behind the men like a child when attacked by a snarling mastiff.

“What’s up? What’s the matter?” asked the men.

“Nothing—nothing.” Pietro puffed like a bull. “Let me at him! I’ll twist his neck—I’ll eat his heart!”

One of the men, a robust fellow who looked like a bravo, approached and took Pietro by the lapels of his coat. He shook him and whispered in his ear, “Tell me about it. This *storo* is under my protection.” Then he pronounced a few words in the jargon of the camorra which Pietro did not understand.

“I don’t know you,” he said, pulling away, “and I don’t want to know you. On the contrary, if you talk to me any more I’ll let you have a punch in the belly that will burst it open.”

“Let him alone,” shouted the men on all sides. “He’s right, per Dio. It’s about his sister. Come along, paesano, let’s go outside. Tell me all about it. We’ll help you to get vengeance.”

They drew him through the door. Mastro Genio, whimpering with fear, was pushed into the kitchen by the padrona, and there he hid.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN Pietro arrived home and told his brother what had happened, another terrible piece of news awaited him. Another noisy scandal had spread through Pandore, and the news had arrived in America with incredible rapidity.

One Sunday morning people on the way to early mass saw that the tavern of Porzia Papandrea, contrary to custom, was closed. Some peasants who were in the habit of buying their weekly supply of tobacco on that day and at that hour, finding themselves in a group before the closed door, began to knock with their feet or with their blackthorn sticks. Porzia, corsetless, grumbling and belching, came to open. Her face was streaked with tears and bleeding scratches.

“Oh, oh, amarezza mia! Sventura mia! I am dead—they have killed me! My daughter—my blood—has killed me. May a great fire burn you, figlia,—may you take no joy in your youth—may the blood I have given

## OF DREAMS

you become water in your veins—may the flesh you have sucked from my breast fall from you in pieces like the leaves from the trees in autumn!"

These curses, uttered in her masculine, whale's voice, and the tears which bathed the bloody streaks on her face, and the deep, thunderous belchings, gave a ridiculous air to her maternal grief.

"What's the matter, Porzia, what's the matter with you this morning?"

"She has betrayed me—my daughter has betrayed me. She has planted a knife in my heart. They went away last night to the Gnura Duvica." The Gnura Duvica was a farm belonging to Bruno Ceravolo. "With Bruno she ran away," continued Porzia. "With Bruno! He took her away from me like a wolf, the coward. He still has a taste for young flesh, may his soul be damned, and after the mother he will devour the daughter. May misfortune seize upon him—may they find him in his bed eaten by worms like carrion in a ditch—may the crows tear out his eyes—may he die in a dungeon with a chain on his foot—may there be no one in the world to give him a drink of water—may grass and nettles grow before his door!"

In a twinkling the news spread through the square and into the church. The women discussed it with wide gestures. The men crowded around the door of the shop.

## ENOUGH

“All right, all right, Porzia, don’t distress yourself,” said an old man, laughing in his mustache. “We are old. Now it’s the turn of the young.” Porzia sat down behind the counter and lamented like a woman in pain. Suddenly she jumped to her feet and opened wide her eyes and her arms with a tragic and solemn gesture. The third bell of the mass rang.

“Oh, Vergine Santissima,” she cried, “now that the gates of heaven are open, listen to me.”

She rushed from the shop, climbed the church steps, and entered the church like a shooting star. On the right a little door opened into the campanile. She entered. In the damp room hung the ropes of the three bells, waving gently. Porzia grabbed one and tore at it. A disordered clamor descended from above like a human voice in anger. Porzia had a tremor of fear amid her rage and rushed back to the steps as though pursued. The women murmured in indignation.

The wretched woman uncovered her breast, an enormous breast, flaccid like an over-ripe fruit, and with a terrible face, launched her malediction toward the people.

“In the name of God, amen! I curse you, my daughter, by the nine months that I carried you, by the pain I suffered bringing you into the world, by every drop of milk I gave you, by the distress I have

## OF DREAMS

suffered in raising you, by the bread with which I nourished you. May your youth depart like a bird of passage—may your eyes not see your way—may no one weep for you or attend you in the hour of your death!"

The scene was appalling—the woman, standing on the church steps weeping, her face wounded and bloody, her arms raised in malediction—invoking the sacred pains of maternity against her own blood. It held something tragic and repugnant at the same time. Her hoarse, masculine voice took on a sound as of a voice from the tomb, and at the same time a priestly majesty.

The men who, in their curiosity, had surrounded her, scattered, awed by her outburst. The women covered their ears. Palamara, with her black cloth over her head and her long wrinkled face, appeared at the door of the church and shouted, "Sciagurata, unfortunate one, the Signore will punish you!"

Porzia continued to curse, sobbing, striking her breast with great blows of her fists as if to punish it for having nourished a daughter who now brought upon her this terrible suffering.

At the Gnura Duvica Bruno Ceravolo sent for a notary from Bovalino and deeded over all his lands to

## ENOUGH

Vittoria Papandrea. The thing was done. Vittoria had brought her plan to a successful conclusion. Marriage was no longer necessary.

When, in the afternoon, the news was brought to her that her mother had cursed her, she was in the vineyard. It was June and the cherries were ripe. Four big trees rustled in the warm wind, agitating a myriad beautiful clusters, shining like rubies. The notary had left, and Bruno, tired from the night's emotions and heavy with food, was stretched out in a sort of hammock under a carob-tree, taking a nap. Vittoria had her hands full of cherries and now and then she carried a cluster to her mouth, pulling off the fruit with her lips.

"Ah, so she cursed me?" she asked, spitting out the blood-colored stones. "Then I shall get fatter." And she gave a complacent glance at the fine farm that now belonged to her.

Beyond the vineyard was a field of grain which waved and sparkled in the sun. It rippled under the breeze with the graceful flow of water. Thousands of grasshoppers filled the air with an immense chirping which seemed to come down from the sky.

"I shall become fatter," Vittoria repeated, feeling herself full of strength and health, "and she will have need of me."

## OF DREAMS

Although Pietro was so far away from all his friends, in that little village in Pennsylvania, he soon learned of the flight of Vittoria and of the scandal which followed it. For some days he remained bewildered, as one who receives a blow of a club on the head and loses control of his body. His first thought was to return to Italy to kill. Then he decided never to return. He would lose himself in this immense foreign continent, so that the sound of his name should reach no more that place where the woman he desired took her pleasure in the arms of another.

The first days were days of torture. He could find no peace. He took in his hands the package of cigarettes Vittoria had given him when he left for America, and as he looked at it her image rose before him, vivid and precise. It obsessed him. He saw her again, tall, smiling, her breast full, her neck strong and delicate in the softness of its lines, her mouth fleshy, always damp, and her black eyes that seemed to sprinkle sparks.

As in all men in whom the spiritual life is little developed, his grief changed to physical suffering. He felt a weight on his heart, he had difficulty in breathing, his mouth tasted bitter, an uneasiness like that of a sick animal filled him.

After a time he felt the need of removing himself

## ENOUGH

from everything that recalled his home. Even the presence of his brother became unbearable. He set out aimlessly, like a wolf driven from his den. He worked a week here and a week there, always unhappy. He sent home all his savings with but four lines of greeting. Sometimes, but rarely, he wrote a line or two to his brother.

## CHAPTER VI

ROSA BLÈFARI was not guilty. The voice of the people accused her, and the voice of the people, so says the proverb, is the voice of God. But may not the voice of God be false? In this case it certainly was, because Rosa had not sinned.

Barely initiated into its mysteries, her fresh and sturdy body and her beautiful youth desired love, love sweet and terrible like death—intoxicating like wine. She loved her husband, as Calabrian women generally love their men, with a love that was, as it were, commanded and necessary.

The life of these women has always been without autonomy. It is difficult, therefore, that a love of pure election, fed by sympathy and reciprocal understanding, should be born and nourished in them. They rarely have the opportunity to choose. They are, instead, chosen. Therefore they are grateful to the man who raises his eyes to them and offers, with his name, the joys of love and of maternity. And since these two joys are the most holy and powerful of their lives, their love becomes holy and powerful in the nuptial

## ENOUGH

bed. There, truly, bodies and souls unite in a lofty, mutual union, with a passion that lacks cerebral refinement, but which is crowned with sacrifice and often with heroism in the battle of life. Is it not, perhaps, heroic to consent to become the wife of a man who leaves on the day following the marriage for the front of battle or of labor?

Rosa Blèfari had been left alone, weeping, on the day following her marriage, in the nest where everything seemed prepared for a long and desired happiness. In the first days she wandered through the house like a dove whose mate has been carried away by a hawk, lost and filled with a restlessness which spread like a mist over the twilight of her languid senses. The days were short and sad, the cold nights endless. Rosa, who until then had never known insomnia, now spent many sleepless nights, sighing, filled with memories that set her blood on fire and accelerated the beating of her heart. The hours passed with a deathly slowness, marked off by the crowing of the roosters, as by a mysterious living clock. She listened to them answering one another from house to house, and the thought of distance was suggested to her. She thought of her husband and of the few hours she had spent with him, and her eyes filled with tears. She felt oppressed by a physical indisposition, by a weight on her head, and by an irresistible agitation.

## OF DREAMS

In the day time she shut herself up in the shop, among the things that reminded her of her husband, and sewed. When she looked at the print on the wall, the woman with the half-closed eyes and the cupid who kissed her, she was disturbed to the point of frenzy.

On days when the sun shone the shop remained open. In the afternoons Don Michelino Fazzolari passed by, glanced in, bowed and asked news of Mastro Genio.

“He hasn’t written yet,” Rosa said, sighing.

Don Michelino was not a seducer, but he provided for his amorous necessities as an ownerless dog provides for his hunger, roaming about from house to house and from door to door, sniffing and whining, picking up a bone, stealing the cat’s soup, finding the gut of a rabbit or the foot of a chicken in a corner.

The wives of the Americani were like abandoned houses for Don Michelino. Rosa Blèfari seemed to him a table loaded with food, but without diners. “Here there will be something,” said Don Michelino to himself, “and well worth the trouble. She is young, healthy, tasty as a peach, and she has barely caught a glimpse of Paradise.”

As a friend of Mastro Genio, Don Michelino became the confidant of the wife. He could write so well, he guessed Rosa’s thoughts so exactly, that the letters

## ENOUGH

contained all the ardor and the heart of the young wife.

When they wrote, they shut themselves up in the shop alone, and, as far as Rosa was concerned, without evil intentions. The weather was cold. It often rained in torrents, accompanied by an interminable wind that whistled like a giant windmill. Rosa prepared a brazier, and there they sat face to face, their feet near the fire and their elbows on the table.

“Tell him this,” said the girl, “and tell him that. For the rest, you know—”

For the rest, Don Michelino employed all the romantic material of his reading, all his memories of Stecchetti and of D’Annunzio, and wrote ardent letters, full of amorous phrases and sighs and desires barely hinted but yet so fervid they made Rosa’s face burn. She felt all these things in a confused way, but she would never dare express them to her husband in that precise and shameless way, not even in the secret of the nuptial bed. She became disturbed as she listened to them, but she trembled with joy. Her husband would feel her great love and her desire to embrace him, even far away across the sea. It was her soul that Don Michelino put into the letters, to travel toward distant America.

One by one Don Michelino pronounced the amorous words, insinuatingly, with an inflection that boys use

## OF DREAMS

when reciting a poem, and as he read he watched Rosa's face to see the effect they produced. When he saw her excited, almost panting for breath, he asked, with a little smile, "Is it all right, like that?" Rosa dared no answer, but she nodded her head and swallowed with an emotion that made her lips tremble. "Poor me," said Rosa in her heart, "how is it that this man can guess my thoughts and my desires?"

This letter writing began to exercise a certain seduction on the mind of the young woman, and soon it became a necessity to her, the only way she had to give vent to her emotions. She began to have him write letters which she never sent, because she had no more envelopes of the Banca Tocci. She had him write them to satisfy her need of hearing the fine, amorous phrases which he put into them. Don Michelino immediately became aware of the effect which his slow seduction produced in her, and he abetted her in her ingenuous maneuvers. Three or four times a week they shut themselves up in the shop and remained there a long time alone, beside the warmth of the brazier, with the wind whirling outside and the rain beating a discreet knocking on the window panes. The people whispered and began to spy. It was thus that when, one day, Rosa had a moment of weakness, it ruined her in the eyes of her world.

## ENOUGH

It was a gray day of fog and wind. In the shop it was as warm as a bedroom. On the brazier Rosa crumbled a piece of orange rind to perfume the air, and a thin, sweet smoke rose in the silence. Rosa was excited. Don Michelino read the ardent phrases in a whisper, and suddenly, as if to have her savor them better, he got up, leaned over her shoulder, spread the sheet of paper out before her, and spoke almost into her ear, reading with emphasis, as if it was he who whispered his words to his own loved one.

Rosa felt, in great alarm, the new meaning in the words, and as Don Michelino bent closer to her burning face, breathing hot on her neck, she looked up at him, and her turbid eyes begged for pity. Don Michelino, placing a hand under her chin, kissed her on the mouth.

“No . . . no . . .” Rosa whispered, breathless, nailed to her seat with desire. “Let me alone, for your soul’s sake.”

A woman who was spying through the window spread the story. Rosa Blèfari was unfaithful to her marriage vows.

With that kiss, submitted to under the influence of a subtle seduction, her infidelity ceased. But now public opinion accused her, and for that there was no remedy.

## OF DREAMS

When Rosa heard of the slanderous gossip, she ran to her father protesting her innocence. Her father drove her away in a rage. Her husband wrote no longer. According to the stories in the town he had left her for another woman. She prayed, she supplicated, she tore her face. No one believed her. She was a traitress, a dog who had betrayed her absent husband. Most pitiless against her was the animosity of the wives of the emigrants, who thought to place their own fidelity in a better light by their vehemence.

The young wife was lost. Everything crumbled around her. Even her poor sister Giusa, who now, driven away by her father, lived alone in a dark, dreary room, did not believe in her virtue. In her impetuous and passionate way, Rosa vowed to kill herself.

One night, after many tears, she clothed herself in her wedding garments and put on all the gold of her nuptials, as on the day when she presented herself before the altar. She left her house and went out behind the Timpa, a ravine with precipitous, almost sheer sides, on which the town rose, and which overhung the olive groves in the valley below.

The night was warm, but sad, a night of the end of May. The grass-hook of a setting moon hung over Aspromonte. One side of the ravine curved down steep toward the valley and then dropped sheer away.

## ENOUGH

It was scattered with junipers and wild finocchi. Half way down the slope a little oak rustled in the light wind. The stars were few and brilliant in the pale blue of the sky. The moon touched the tips of the Apennines. Everything was submerged in shadow and became indistinct and silent. Even the insects in the thickets grew still at the imminence of the setting of the moon. An intense melancholy descended over the world.

Rosa wept at the thought of death, and murmured as she looked at the sky, "I shall lose my beautiful youth!"

She thought again of her single night of love, and one by one she lived again, in awe, all its moments—its words—its confidences—its modesties—its kisses—its tears of joy. "I shall lose my beautiful youth," she repeated amid her sobs. "I shall lose my beautiful youth."

A terrible depression invaded her, yet she could no longer live. She fell to her knees on the edge of the precipice, lifted her hands toward the sky, and said, almost aloud, "Oh Lord, Thou Who seest into the hearts of men, Thou knowest my innocence. Pardon me, Thou Who art in Heaven, now that men refuse to believe in me."

The moon had disappeared. An owl in the branches of the oak tree uttered its sad cry. Terrified, Rosa

## OF DREAMS

paused a moment, then threw herself madly down.

At first the irresistible impulse of self-preservation prompted her to grasp at the cutting stalks of the pampas grass, then she abandoned herself to the sharp descent, and lost her senses. Her beautiful body crashed to the stony bottom in the olive grove and came to rest at the foot of a thick clump of mastic.

At dawn the dying girl opened her eyes a moment. Her limbs were shattered, her body was motionless. Her eyes, veiled with blood, saw the sky, far off and pale, from which the light of day had not yet driven away the shadows. A few golden clouds floated slowly toward the mountains like giant petals. In the grove the birds awoke and twittered. Two winged forms passed over her head and perched on a branch, uttering soft sobs like pigeons cooing. They were turtle doves in love.

“Oh, I have lost my beautiful youth!” murmured the dying girl, and closed her eyes forever.

Only Giusa wept for her, and that in secret. She was carried to the cemetery without the sound of the bells.

## CHAPTER VII

GESU, left alone working in a foundry, for some time wrote twice a month regularly to his father and Mariuzza. Then suddenly the regularity was broken and they heard nothing from him. The next time he wrote he said he had been ill and that it was only a few days since he had been able, with great difficulty, to go back to work.

After this his letters, ordinarily homesick but serene and full of details, took on a gloomy and reticent tone. Invariably he said he was not very well, that he had not fully recovered from his sickness, and that he worked only enough to be able to eat, because he hadn't the strength to do any more. His homesickness for his town and for his loved ones became somewhat morbid. Exclamations of sadness and regret that he had left his home and his country formed the substance of his correspondence.

Rocco, worn down by all the sorrows that had befallen him, was worried. Mariuzza insisted that her uncle should write to him to come home.

## OF DREAMS

“Fortune does not smile on him,” she said, “but it makes no difference. It’s useless now to insist. If he is sick, how do you expect him to make money? He will die in that far-off land. The only remedy for him is to have him come home. His native air will bring health back to him.”

The Varvaros, with the natural cupidity of the peasant, hesitated. But finally, at Mariuzza’s insistence, they wrote him a letter asking him to return immediately because they were old and wanted to marry off their ward so that they could go away tranquilly when God should call them to Himself.

Gèsu drew up his balance. In about a year of work he had sent a thousand lire to his father and had deposited two thousand in the bank. The year was not lost. He wrote to his father and to Mariuzza that he would return home for Christmas.

The Varvaros and Mariuzza went with Rocco to meet Gèsu at the station of Bovalino. The day was cold and dry, the sky had a sheen like metal. On the edges of the road and in the holes on the wagon path, wherever a stream or a pool of water collected, was a thin sheet of ice. Over the fields, stiffened with cold, thrushes passed in flight. In the groves the ridge-poles of the olive crushers smoked, and from them came at

## ENOUGH

times the song of the women who gathered olives, in a wide and melancholy rhythm.

Since Gèsu had not told them the exact time of his arrival, all four of them appeared at nine o'clock in the morning before the iron grating in front of the station. As each train came in, whether from Reggio or Catanzaro, they approached the gates and looked closely at all the passengers.

At noon Gèsu had not arrived, and they decided to go and eat something. Near the station was a little restaurant run by a sailor called Two Noses, because he once had his nose split open, and the scar remained. They entered and ordered something to eat. They sat at a table all black with grease and hardened dust, covered with a homespun tablecloth. A single plate, on which was a portion of stock-fish with small onions and olives, was set before them. Caterina Varvaro had brought some bread, some sheep's-milk cheese and some pears in a napkin. They began to eat, dipping slices of bread stuck on sharp iron forks into the blood-red sauce. The stock-fish stew was seasoned with a quantity of ginger, so that the sharp taste cried out for wine.

“Anything to drink, paesani?” asked Two Noses.

“Bring us a litre—but good,” said Varvaro.

“Wine of Ardore,” said Two Noses, “better than Marsala.”

## OF DREAMS

As he placed a green bottle and a glass on the table they heard the shrill whistle of a locomotive, and immediately afterwards the rolling and puffing of the train as it entered the station. Rocco started up.

“What train is that?”

“The twelve-thirty train,” answered Two Noses. “It comes from Catanzaro.”

“I’m going to see,” exclaimed Rocco, wiping his mouth with the palm of his hand. “He probably won’t be on it, but you never can tell.”

When he reached the front of the station the passengers were already swarming toward the exit. The last one was a pale, tall youth, dressed in a blue suit, with a big paper valise on his shoulder. Rocco felt a tightening at his heart. Was this his son? The young man passed through the gate, dropped his valise to the ground, and threw his arms around Rocco’s neck.

“How are you, father?”

“My son—my blessed son!” stammered the old man, trembling with emotion and kissing him impetuously. “I didn’t know you any more.” He patted him on the chest and shoulders and moved back to get a better look at him. “How is it that you are so wasted away? Are you still sick? Cursed be America and whoever invented it!”

## ENOUGH

“I am better now,” said Gèsu, in a voice that seemed to have become sweeter and more melancholy since he went away.

“Didn’t the air suit you?”

“No, it didn’t,” the young man answered, embarrassed. Then he asked, “Are you alone?”

“No, the Varvaros and Mariuzza are waiting here in Two Noses’ restaurant. “Have you eaten? You shall have something with us.”

“And how is Giusa?”

Father and son looked at each other awkwardly, almost with shame. They dropped their eyes to the ground. The picture of Rosa, who had died so tragically, interposed itself between them as if to say, “I, too, am here.”

“She is well,” said Rocco, without raising his eyes. “She had her baby—a beautiful baby. I didn’t abandon her . . . but— The punishment of God!” They moved off, silent.

In the restaurant there was rejoicing. Varvaro and Caterina embraced him like a son. When Mariuzza saw him, so pale and thin, she burst out weeping. “Cursed be America,” the girl said through her tears. “Cursed be America! For four cents you give your life away.”

Rocco called Two Noses. “Listen, haven’t you, per-

## OF DREAMS

haps, some of those long, thin sausages? My son has just come from America, and I want to have a celebration, per la malogna."

A few minutes later the long, thin sausages were roasting on the spit, spreading a highly flavored smoke and an appetizing odor of spices and fat through the restaurant.

"I guess you didn't eat any of these in America," said Rocco, happily. He cut the roasted sausages over a piece of bread that had been dipped in fat. "Stuff in America isn't as good as ours."

"Oh, no. In America you eat the flesh of donkeys and dogs in sausages, and you pay twice as much."

"Eh, my son, do you remember before you left you said that this land was accursed? You won't say it any more, now." Gèsu bowed his head and sighed.

In the heat of the fire and the food, and in the nearness of his loved ones, Gèsu regained some of his former animation. A slight color reddened his cheek bones, his eyes became brighter, and he ate with good appetite while he replied to the numerous questions they asked him.

When lunch was over they left for their village. Rocco had brought his old donkey to Bovalino, with a cushion filled with waste on the pack-saddle so that his son might ride home. But Gèsu preferred to walk,

## ENOUGH

and the donkey was loaded with the valise and some provisions that the Varvaros and Rocco bought for the Christmas feasting.

That evening the whole village came to Rocco's house, in a continuous procession. Gèsu was the first of the forty emigrants who had left the year before to return from America, and all the families came to get news of them. But Gèsu knew nothing of any of them, since he had moved away from all his friends.

Among others, the widow Rocco came, with her child in her arms, purple with cold. She wanted to know how her boy was. When she saw Gèsu so worn and so pale, with his eyes tired and his lips colorless, she felt her heart squeezed tight as in a fist.

“Have you seen my boy, friend Gèsu?”

“No, comare, I was alone for the last six months. When I left him he was working in a gang. He was the *ereboya* and was doing very well.”

“And who does his washing and his mending, poor orphan? Are there women in that country who do such things? For pay, of course, for outside of here you pay, even for your sighs.”

“Everybody does his own washing and mending. Sunday is wash day for everyone.”

“Oh, Gèsu mio! I can just see that washing,

## OF DREAMS

and the holes in his socks!" Everybody laughed.

Finally Rocco and his son were left alone.

"Father," said Gèsu, "I should like to go and see Giusa."

Rocco felt a knot in his throat. "Let us go," he said. "Blood is not water."

Giusa lived in a lower room in the house of the Perris. Rocco, who had not kept her at home for fear of what the world would say, went to see her every evening. He was never empty-handed . . . now it was fruit, now a bit of greens, and now a piece of stock-fish he had for her. He set traps for her and often brought her a half-dozen or more robins.

Her door was closed, but through a little window at the height of a man's breast, without any glass, but sheltered from the air by a screen woven of switches and canes, came a weak light. They knocked.

"Who is it?" asked Giusa in a sharp voice.

"Open, it is I," her father answered.

They entered. The low vaulted room was filled with smoke, because the hearth had no chimney. In the middle stood a big straw bed with a black and white striped woolen cover. Near it was a chest, and a few steps away wood and mastic roots were piled up. On the wall hung a reed basket in which Giusa kept the little bread she found or earned, and a few onions.

## ENOUGH

In the midst of her squalor, however, the girl was more beautiful than ever. Her face, fuller, gentler, was luminous, almost, under the halo of maternity. Her full breast gave an impression of freshness and grace, and in her eyes was that wistful sweetness which one sees in the disinherited before the sight of the inexhaustible good of life.

And this is one of the most marvelous things of Providence. When man has fallen to the depths of every wretchedness, and it seems that everything is lacking and that everything crumbles before him, then, as soon as he is resigned to his losses, within him and around him a thousand other things present themselves to him. What he once despised or disregarded becomes precious, and a new sweetness, a gentle and holy faith, reconciles him to existence.

Giusa was dressed in black. She was the only one who wore mourning for poor Rosa. When she saw Gèsu she covered her face with her hands and burst into sobs. He approached her with a heavy heart, and they embraced close and long, wordless, both weeping like children, overcome by the flood of their tumultuous affections.

“Think how you left me—and how you find me again!” said Giusa, breaking the silence.

“Beh! God has commanded thus,” exclaimed Gèsu. “Let us not think of it any more. Tell me, rather,

## OF DREAMS

how you are, and where do you keep your child?"

"It is here," said Giusa, and her face lit up with a great joy when he mentioned her little one. Taking her brother by the hand she led him to the bed. There, in a great chestnut basket hanging from a cord fastened to the wall slept the child. Giusa ran to the hearth and brought a light.

"Look at him, how beautiful he is, the poor innocent, left fatherless before he was born!" Her voice was stifled with tears at the memory.

In the cradle the dark poverty of the house disappeared. The baby, in its wrappings, with its red, almost congested little face, slept peacefully, as might the bud of some mysterious flower. Its swaddling clothes and cushions were snowy white. On its little head was a bonnet of crocheted wool, with two little blue bows at the temples, and ties under the chin with a silk ribbon. In the cradle everything breathed freshness, grace and benediction. The child seemed one of those field flowers that grow in the middle of a manure pile or by the ledges in the rotting leaves.

Gèsu sighed, but an inner and religious joy had opened wide his heart. Before this cradle he forgot shame, dishonor, and all the necessary conventions of the world, to worship the goodness of life that is perpetuated in every age, with its perfume of eternity and its irresistible grace. They sat down on the hearth,

## ENOUGH

happy with a mysterious happiness. The vision of this child, even though born in sin, had softened their hearts and smoothed out their faces.

Guisa asked after her brother's health and about Pietro, and then they spoke of a thousand other things, deliberately avoiding the subject that oppressed them all. Finally Giusa spoke of it diffidently.

"Last night," she said, "I dreamed of our poor sister, of our Rosa. Perhaps it was because you were coming home today. Don't misjudge her, my brother. She was innocent. She appeared before me, as beautiful as the sun, with two big earrings, a pendant at her neck, and a dress all made of gold. 'Give me your child,' she said to me, and took it from my arms. I gave it to her willingly, but when I remembered that she was dead, and as it seemed to me she meant to take it away with her, I seized her by the dress and said, 'Give him back to me—give him back to me! You are dead. I don't want you to take my baby with you.' She answered with a smile, 'Here he is, but I am not dead. I am in a beautiful garden, waiting.' 'What are you waiting for?' I asked her. 'I am waiting until as many years pass by as the minutes I spent with my husband on my marriage night, because I remembered them all in the moment when I died, and the Signore does not wish me to remember them.' 'And when these years have passed?'"

## OF DREAMS

‘I shall go to Paradise,’ she said to me, and disappeared like a ray of light.”

All three were disturbed, as if they had really seen the poor, dead girl vanish in a ray of light.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE time of the Christmas feasting was drawing near and everything wore a holiday air. Gèsu felt himself grow daily more rested and strengthened. A great contentment filled his simple heart. His visit to America was like a dream. He had neither seen nor understood it. In that great land, vast, tumultuous, yet marvelous in its orderliness, Gèsu had worked mechanically, like a yoked beast. Now he found himself again in his own land, with his mountains and his little sea. The orchards, the hills crowned with the lovely umbrella-shaped olive trees, the stony valleys, and the salty slopes, white and rose with sandstone and scattered with mastic and tamarisk and blue-gray rocks along the country roads—all this spread before his eyes, from the mountain to the sea, serene, limpid and familiar in the gentle sun of the calm and silent December days.

He recognized the trees one by one, as if they had been men. The enormous rock with its jagged points, erect in the middle of the slope of Macrolis, the painted

## OF DREAMS

houses of the Carruso, Pietra di Febo, isolated and reddish amid the dark green of the woods like a gigantic meteor fallen from the sky, and, farther up, Castello Ati and Pietra Longa, with its rugged cone scattered with ilex and myrtle, and then the line of the mountains, candid and serene in the greenish sky through the gold-flecked air—all this made his heart leap in an intimate and profound joy.

He had returned to his element. The air of his homeland, arid, and yet beautiful, entered his lungs, blew gently on his face like a familiar caress and brought with it the remembered scents of gardens, of green things, of the kitchen, of the wet earth and of dead leaves. It brought, too, the disagreeable odors, but he had been accustomed to them from childhood, and now they made him feel that his feet were firmly planted on the earth and that he had nothing to fear that was not the will of the Lord.

He compared the smells and the gentle, kindly voices of his home with those of America. Fantastic pictures came to him—pestilential exhalations from factories which seemed to issue forth from a satanic forge where the gates of the world were being built again—the deafening, threatening clamor of machines—the mad speed of trains—all the tumultuous humanity that swarmed through the streets incessantly with a harsh joyfulness—all the luxury barely

## ENOUGH

glimpsed, the money, the idle men and women with shining hands—and over it all, an atmosphere of war and tempest, a tremendous, stormy activity, in which the heart and the brain never rested and seemed never to have time to look at the sun of the good God. Even the earth had a different texture and a different odor.

As he saw again the earth of his garden at Bony, covered with sandstone and dead leaves, with its trees that seemed painted, so beautiful they were, and the vines that rose between the furrows with the nervous, active grace of the limbs of a goat, he seemed to see again the face of his mother. He touched the earth, crumbled clods in his hands with the voluptuousness of a man caressing his mistress, and he felt that an intimate, secret, cordial relationship existed between him and it. The pear trees and the vines and all the plants in the garden seemed to look lovingly at him and say, "Welcome, my poor son, we will cure you, we will give freshness to your blood again and kill the germs with which civilization has infected you as it passed over your head like a whirlwind. We will give you back health and peace." And slowly, Gèsu grew strong again.

Christmas morning, although he felt rather ill, Gèsu went to church and sang the *Dormi e non piangere*. He and Rocco spent Christmas day with the Varvaros,

## OF DREAMS

making a single table, because the Blèfaris had no woman in the house. Caterina and Mariuzza worked a whole week to prepare the various kinds of fried foods that custom demanded for the feast, and the sweets, the *nacatole*, a paste of eggs and sugar, and *zippole*, as soft as Spanish bread, and *sammartine*, currant buns, with chopped dried figs, walnuts and almonds, which they roasted in the oven. Rocco brought a huge faïence plate to the table loaded with all kinds of fruit, walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, chestnuts, oranges, tangerines, prickly pears, and, in the middle, an enormous sweet-smelling citron, as big as a squash.

“On Christmas night all the fruits must be on the table,” said Rocco, raising his plate like a votive offering to God. “Everything must be on the table where is the bread, which is the grace of God and is watched over by the angels.”

On Gèsu’s neck and arms an eruption began to break out. “You are renewing your blood,” said Varvaro, and slapped him on the shoulder, smiling. “Eat, per la malogna, eat and drink! Bread and wine—the life of man! Eating wipes out seven evils, and more than seven there are not in all the world. The doctors invent all the others to make money.”

“Do you really think so, uncle Bruno?” asked Gèsu, as if that statement expanded his heart.

## ENOUGH

“Of course. Never listen to doctors. Eat, drink and work, for work is also a medicine for the life of man.”

Mariuzza, in holiday dress, passed between the fire and the table with her cheeks pink, her eyes shining and her great crown of hair twisted in a double knot. She was smiling, as happy as a new bride. She was grateful to God with all her soul, and she would have divided her heart up among all His creatures, like a crust of bread.

As they all sat down at table, Caterina and Mariuzza began to make signs to each other in some embarrassment.

“What’s the matter?” asked Rocco, who had already noticed certain goings-on in the kitchen.

“This is the matter,” said Mariuzza, all red in the face, “there is someone missing. This is a blessed time, we must forget our wrongs.” They all fell silent, moved. Gèsu got up, went into the kitchen, and after a moment he came back with Giusa on his arm. All their eyes were tear-filled.

## CHAPTER IX

*A*FTER Christmas the Varvaros waited for Gèsu to set the date for the wedding, but he said nothing.

The weather turned stormy. All through the month of January it rained with the sirocco, and the few clear days were cold, with a dull sun that gave no warmth.

Gèsu had fallen back into a state of fatigue and blackest melancholy. He did not know what was the matter with him. A continuous languor held his limbs and kept him at Bony, within doors, with his hands dangling between his knees and his head hanging heavy like lead. The humidity irritated him and the wind gave him insomnia. His bones pained him, especially the joints. Now and then he felt sharp, stabbing pains in his head that made him grit his teeth. He kept to himself, gloomy, suspicious and alone, as if he were afraid that his father and his sweetheart might read in his eyes the terrible secret hidden there.

## ENOUGH

Sometimes he awoke in the middle of the night and could not go to sleep again. He turned over and over in his bed, a light, cold sweat dampening his forehead, and his breast and limbs seemed to unfasten themselves and flow away. It seemed to him that an unhealthy and watery blood ran in his veins in which, all his life, the boils would germinate like pernicious weeds. Then there appeared before him two visions which, in different ways, disturbed him almost to delirium. The vision of Mariuzza, so good and gentle and pure, who seemed to desire to rejuvenate him with the light of her loving eyes, and another, the vision of a tempting angel, beautiful with a different beauty, artificial and infernal, sweet-smelling with a disquieting and irresistible perfume, like that of a poisonous flower.

Before that vision all the strength was shaken from his body, as by a dizziness before a precipice. He pressed his fists against his eyes, hid under the covers like a frightened child, and his teeth chattered, but whether with desire or fear, he did not know.

And all this time he wasted away before the anxious eyes of his father, who could find no reason for it.

January and February passed in this way. Lent came. The Varvaros began to protest. Did that boy have some other plan in his head? Was it possible that he brought a lot of money back from America

## OF DREAMS

and now intended to make a better match? One day Bruno spoke frankly to Rocco and asked him to come to some decision.

“My niece is not afraid she will not find another match. She has a fine dot and she is a girl who, by the grace of God, is cited in the whole village as an example of what a young woman should be. We consented to allow her to marry Gèsu in order to satisfy her, for, although she seems like a silent kitten, she has her mind set on it. We are not discussing the young man. He is a good boy, he works hard, and he is serious and God fearing. But if things are to be done—will, let us do them. Why wait any longer? We are old, and before we close our eyes we should like to see her married.”

Somewhat mortified, Rocco made excuses for his son, attributing his silence to the state of his health, but he promised to speak to him about it frankly. And that very evening, as they sat in front of the fire, he cleverly drew the conversation around to the subject of the marriage, in a vague way, as if he just happened to think of it. Gèsu fell silent, with his head bent over, tracing and rubbing out random lines in the ashes with a spit.

“Now that you have got back your health,” said the old man, “I want you to get settled down. You are the only one of my children who has not given me

## ENOUGH

displeasure. You know very well where your sisters ended up. Your brother is lost, somewhere in the world. He writes—yes—he writes sometimes. He even sends me money. I have four thousand lire of his in a handkerchief, in this chest, because I never touch a penny of what my children earn. Money is no good to me. I am old. I want my flesh and blood with me, and my flesh and blood is far away. You are the only one who remains with me. At least let me have the consolation of seeing you settle down before I die."

Gèsu did not reply. He looked like a ram, with his gloomy face and his eyes obstinately held down. Rocco became irritated.

"Why don't you answer me," he exclaimed, shaking him. "It's you I'm speaking to. Have you got something else in mind? Oh, Vergine Santissima! Little children bring little troubles, and big children bring big troubles!"

Gèsu raised his sad eyes, as if to speak. But he lowered them immediately, uttering a deep sigh, filled with fear.

"You've got something else on your mind," said Rocco, anxiously, "and that's why you are destroying yourself. Speak, sangue della malogna! Confide in your father. Don't you, too, bring sorrow to me, for I've had enough."

"Father," Gèsu burst out, "I shall tell you every-

## OF DREAMS

thing, because I need you to advise me. I am suffering too much. Father, I don't know whether I can get married or not."

"Why don't you know?" asked Rocco, surprised. He did not suspect, even remotely, the hidden meaning in the words.

"I don't know! If what the doctor in America told me is true, I can never get married."

"What story is this, Santa Vergine Maria! What story is this?" Rocco beat his hands on his knees. "What did the doctor tell you? Are you, then, so sick?"

"I shall tell you everything," said Gèsu. "I must tell you everything. You are old and will be able to advise me. Pardon me for what I tell you, my father—" and at these words a sudden, sickly blush purpled his pale cheeks, "but what do you expect? God made the world thus, and you were young once, yourself."

There was a pause. Then Gèsu began his tale in a thread of a voice like a shamed child at confession.

"In America I met a woman. Three days I was with her. She was one of those who travel around the world and, like the comets, bring pestilence and perdition. She was a German girl. My brother left me all alone in Pennsylvania, and because I like to sing, in the evenings I used to go to a *storo* to pass the time. We would drink a mug of beer and play the harmonica. A work-

## ENOUGH

man from Sinopoli used to come who played it like an organ. One evening we saw three women come in, three of those *ghelle* who go around with a stick in the hand and a cigarette in the mouth. They sat down with us, ordered beer for everybody, and said, "Sing and play for us till morning." They were beautiful, all three of them, with their white skins that seemed made of blood and milk. But one of them, God save us, was as beautiful as the Madonna Immacolata in our church. She had a mouth as red as a pomegranate flower and hair that was spun gold, and a pair of eyes, my father, a pair of eyes—! The eyes of Satan himself, before he was cursed by God, were certainly not more beautiful! Big eyes they were—I've never seen eyes so big—long and green like two lemon leaves. They all sang, and I, too, sang a few songs of our village. My voice pleased the girl with the big eyes, and she took me away with her."

He stopped, as though his memories frightened him, and he wiped his forehead with the palm of a hand that trembled.

"I swear to you, father, that I never even knew her name. I think she was the Devil in his travels, an evil temptation, mortal sin dressed as a woman. She kept me three nights with her, and when she let me go I was no longer a man. When I left her that morning I was afraid that the wind would blow me away. I had

## OF DREAMS

no more marrow in my bones—I had no legs. My head was as empty as an egg that has been sucked dry by a serpent. It seemed to me that she had drunk all my life away with her mouth, that was tinted like blood. Everything is evil in the great world, father, even love. Those first days I thought I should die. I swear to you that before then I had never known a woman. Therefore her memory intoxicated me. She had on her an evil odor, that swelled your veins and made your heart beat faster. Even now, when I think of it, I get cold. After that day I no longer felt well. The tiredness, the feeling of emptiness in my bones that she left in me stayed with me, and my blood became corrupt and poisoned. Strange eruptions came all over my body, and in the mornings my back pained me. After about a month I went to the doctor. He made me undress, examined two or three of the eruptions on my chest, felt me carefully under the shoulders and on my neck and behind my ears, and then he said to me, smiling, "You are a very sick boy." He asked me if I was married, and when I told him I was engaged and intended to get married as soon as I got home, he stared into my face with fierce eyes. "Take good care not to get married," he said to me, "before you have taken many treatments. You are very sick." He ordered me to have injections, which I had given me in a dispensary for the workmen, and they made

## ENOUGH

swellings under my skin as hard as wood and as big as oak-apples. I grew tired of this, and I didn't go back any more. They did me neither good nor harm. I had some fever, and then I started back to work. But the poison has remained in my blood, and it is eating me away. Every time I think of that woman I seem to dangle over an abyss."

"My poor, unlucky boy," sighed Rocco. "You have fallen in love with that woman!"

"In love? No, father. I never saw her again—I shall never see her again. I love Mariuzza and I want to marry her, with God's benediction. But I am afraid that woman has put some poison in my blood, has worked some witchcraft on me. While we were together she made me smoke a tobacco that cut off my legs and made mortal sleep come. In that sleep, while she whispered strange words in my ear, I saw, one night, all the village—all of you—as if you were standing in front of me. I am afraid she was a witch, an instrument of the Devil, who has given me one of those strange diseases that make the blood go bad. Women like that go around the world carrying the seven deadly sins on their backs. I have told you everything, father, as I would tell my father confessor. Tell me what I must do and I will obey you."

"What you must do?" said Rocco, who had become serene again. "Get married. You are not sick. What

## OF DREAMS

you have is a great weakness. Don't believe what the doctors say. Woman, my son, is one of man's diseases, sometimes the worst. The women of the city, God free us from them, are worse than pernicious fever. They drink man's blood like vampires, and you have to cut them off with scissors to get rid of them. It may also be that the witch has cast a spell on you. Tomorrow we shall go together to see Mico del Re, who, God keep us, speaks with the Devil, too. If you are bewitched he will remove the charm as you would remove a thorn from your foot."

## CHAPTER X

EARLY next morning father and son appeared before the house of Mico del Re. He was a shrewd and cunning peasant who declared that he spoke with the dead, and he brought news of them around from house to house, and begged. He knew how to exorcise the evil eye, to set dislocated limbs, to drive out worms from children, and, with a glance, how to make chickens go mad. He even tracked down cattle thieves and showed their faces mirrored in a basin of water. He lived in the country with his wife and children, and he made more on the revenue of his magic than from work.

The Blèfaris found him cutting off prickly pear leaves to feed to a donkey that was kept in a shed. His wife, as long and dirty as a chimney-sweep's brush, with a dark face and teeth like a rake, was gathering them up and putting them into a dirty wicker hamper.

"Good-day, friend Mico," said Rocco. "Are you working?"

## OF DREAMS

“What can we do, friend Rocco,” he replied. “It is our destiny. And what brings you to these parts so early in the day?”

“I’ve come with my boy to speak to you about a matter.”

“Is he the one you had in America?”

“I had both of them in America. This one returned a couple of months ago.”

Mico understood that it was a consultation, and leaving his work, he went with them into the house. In the narrow, smoky kitchen the fire was lit and two boys with sleep still in their eyes were warming themselves before it. Their father turned them out of doors like a couple of dogs.

“Now, how can I serve you, friend Rocco?”

Rocco told him the story of the American woman, what the doctor said, the fears of his son and his wish to see him settled down.

Mico smiled. “Doctors—they don’t know anything. The great doctor is God. Once upon a time, when there weren’t any of these doctors, you could count man’s diseases on the tips of your fingers. Pneumonia, pleurisy, ague, hysteria, boils—and everything was accounted for. But now, according to the doctors, man has more diseases than hairs on his head. My dear friend Rocco, we all must live. They try to make a living, too. I have never gone to school, I can’t even

## ENOUGH

read and write, but, with the aid of God, I cure sick people better than the doctors do, because He is the Great Physician. What you have told me is right—your son is not sick. That woman sucked him dry, like a bone, and left him with a great weakness. If there is no spell, I tell you he's not sick. And if there is, we'll find it out right away."

Solemnly he made a great sign of the cross, then opened a chest and drew out a folded blue paper and opened it. Inside were grains of incense, drippings and candle-ends of brown wax, of the kind they burn in church for the office of the Shadows during Passion week, and then, dried flowers, the little urns of poppies, and wild herbs. He took a bunch of dried palm leaves and olive branches from the wall and began to cut them into little pieces. On the pile he put a few grains of salt and then poured the mixture on a piece of tile covered with hot coals.

"Kneel down, my young friend," he said to Gèsu. "If I am not mistaken, you're the one who sings so well in church."

"Yes," said Gèsu.

Father and son kneeled down, terrified before this mystic ceremony, while Mico del Re, with the smoking tile in his hand, began to circle around the young man, mumbling.

"These are the ten words of truth," he stated, then—

## OF DREAMS

- “One, one sole God Who reigns—
- “Two, the two luminaries of the world, the sun and the moon—
- “Three, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity—
- “Four, the four evangelists—
- “Five, the five wounds of Our Lord, Jesus Christ—
- “Six, the three and three hours of agony—
- “Seven, the seven swords of the Virgin Mary—
- “Eight, the eight burning candelabra—
- “Nine, the nine choirs of the angels—
- “Ten, the Ten Commandments.”

Through the half-opened door little more than a pale reflection of the morning entered. The wax and the incense burned with a slight sputtering and scattered into the air a violet smoke, slightly perfumed. Rocco and Gèsu, on their knees, with hearts that scarcely beat, held their breath as they listened to the solemn words. They were enveloped in a profound, religious awe.

When Mico del Re finished he threw the coals on the fire and exclaimed, “God be praised, there is no spell, friend Rocco. There is no spell.”

They remained kneeling, and followed with fascinated eyes the movements of the sorcerer as if he had been a priest at the altar.

“Arise,” said Mico, “and be glad. There is no spell,

## ENOUGH

I tell you. Did you not see how tranquilly everything burned? When there is any witchcraft, the salt explodes and the coals jump as if they had devils in them. You, then, my young friend, have nothing the matter with you at all. A little weakness, perhaps, but we have the medicine for that—chicken broth and wine. Eating drives away the seven evils. To work up an appetite, take a decoction of wormwood every morning for two weeks. You can find wormwood everywhere."

"Can he get married, then?" asked Rocco.

"Yes, he can get married. I don't believe in these diseases caused by women. Even if that devil did give him disease, marriage will cure him. The blood of a virgin cures everything. Buck up, my young friend," continued Mico, slapping Gèsu on the shoulder, "and never pay any attention to doctors. They are in league with the druggists to torment their neighbor and get his money."

They gave him a five lire note and set out toward home. Gèsu, as happy as a child, kicked his legs in the air and rubbed his cold hands. His confidence returned, and it seemed to him that all his aches and pains had disappeared as if by magic, and that freshness came back to his blood, and the joy of living. He had no sickness in his body, then. Yet, even if he had something, his marriage would cure it. He thought of

## OF DREAMS

Mariuzza, and his heart swelled in his breast. Now he could marry this gentle, modest, home-loving girl, who would sweeten his life with her simple, submissive affection, and would help him with his work. The vision of the other woman faded. As he breathed the fresh air of the morning, full of the damp smell of the orchard and of growing grass, he recalled the warm, intoxicating odor of her flesh—flesh born in corruption. Now he was at home. He felt himself reborn. Never again would he smell that perfume—never again would he see that woman, with her savage eyes. His health would return, and out of his strong peasant love would be born a flourishing family that would comfort and help him in his old age.

“O Lord, I give Thee thanks,” said Rocco, looking at the sun that had risen over the sea and spread its warm light through all the valley, as far as the distant mountains. “Oh Lord, I thank Thee. Thou givest the wound, but Thou givest also the salve.” Then he turned to Gèsu. “Now that our minds are at rest, you will get married right away? What do you say?”

“Yes,” answered Gèsu. “Speak to Varvaro, and let us get ready. After Easter I shall get married.”

In the orchards the almonds were already in blossom, and as the chaffinches fluttered through the branches, white with delicate blooms, the silvery petals wafted slowly downward, like snowflakes. And

## ENOUGH

the trees, which flowered in the still dead, cold fields, were like a happy augury, a sweet promise of warmer days, a renewal of the year.

Like that renewal, the life and health of Gèsu would take on new strength.

## CHAPTER XI

ONE week after Easter Gèsu was married.

Although the Blèfaris had been struck by so many domestic misfortunes during the previous year that their hearts were too sad for feasting, nevertheless the Varvaros insisted that the nuptial ceremony should be, as far as possible, rich and solemn. The two childless old people had dedicated all their lives to Mariuzza, and now that she was about to be married to a fine young man in whom they had every confidence, they wished to show their great happiness with a feast that would be memorable. Money was there, because Varvaro had put aside a good many hundred lire notes that no one knew anything about, tied up in a silk handkerchief and hidden in his mattress.

Gèsu, refreshed in spirit, and sure that his marriage would free him once and for all from every weakness in his body and his mind, spent a good half of his savings from America to buy the gold and the wedding garments for his bride. He knew that although Mariuzza was timid and modest, she had, in common with all women, her little ambitions in the

## ENOUGH

matter of adornment, and he decided to satisfy them to the full. The clothes were made at Benestare by a seamstress who had learned her trade in Reggio and had specialized in trousseaux.

On the wedding day, a splendid April day with a golden sun, when Mariuzza came out of the house on the arm of her uncle Varvaro at the head of the procession, she looked like a Madonna. She wore a dress all of silk, the skirt of pale blue organzine and the blouse of dove-gray satin with rose satin trimmings and with lace at the wrists and throat. In her ears were two rosettes with garnets in the center and on her fingers she wore two rings set with stones. Around her neck was a gold cross and chain, and on her head was a kerchief of silk with big, bright flowers, which barely hid the double twist of her hair. Her beautiful, childlike face, still pale, was animated with an expression of mingled joy and fear, the sweet and trembling expression of one who approaches a dream and sees it become reality.

In honor of the bride, and through love of his son, Rocco made the supreme sacrifice. He wore shoes, an old pair, that he dug up out of the attic, and that were as hard as the wood of an elm. He dampened and softened them as best he could by coating them for three days in succession with a mixture of oil and

## OF DREAMS

water beaten together, and now he hobbled along clumsily in the procession, like a criminal dragging his chains.

They went first to the town hall and then to the church, and when they left it was almost ten o'clock. Hundreds of sparrows hopped around on the roofs in the warm sun, and in the tufts of grass growing in the eaves lizards lazily warmed themselves. In the little square before the church a knot of noisy children waited for the sweetmeats. When Rocco and Varvaro, who had filled their pockets with them, came out on to the church steps, they threw handfuls of them into the corners of the square with the wide, rapid gesture of the sower of wheat. The children rushed for them, shouting and rolling in the dust, while the little parade silently passed on.

On the road toward home many of the wives of the emigrants threw grain down upon the bridal couple from the windows, a sign of joy and a wish for prosperity and numerous offspring. Mariuzza kept her head bowed, sweet and timid as a dove. Gèsu, pale but happy, smiled at everyone.

When they all arrived home, sweetmeats and wine were offered the wedding guests and bread and cheese in abundance was distributed to the children and the poor. Toward noon they all went in to dinner.

## ENOUGH

Varvaro had slaughtered a sheep for the occasion for the preparation of the feast he had called in Cuscunà, a bricklayer who had learned to cook during his military service. They ate and drank happily and well, and then Cuscunà, already a bit joyful from the wine, took up a guitar and improvised verses in praise and honor of the bride. "When you were born, Rosa of the Sea," he sang, "the sun and the moon made a great feast. Naples and Messina made a great feast, and you were baptized at the font of St. Peter's in Rome. Your godmother was the queen and your godfather was the sacred crown."

In a series of Pindaric verses he then sang the praises of all the guests, one by one, emphasized with a few ironic sallies their most salient characteristics. After each verse he drank and the guests beat the table with their glasses and drank with him to the honor of the one whose praises had just been sung. Then they went on to a poetic contest. Cuscunà, with his eyes squinted up and his mustache dripping with the good red wine, summoned all the guests to compete with him. The one who could tell the biggest tale would be the winner. He began, rocking back and forth on his thin legs, his head on one shoulder:—

*"Nu vecchiu fusu di 'na vecchia vitti,  
non era ruttu ma pocu tenia;*

## OF DREAMS

*di la metà mi fici tri saitti  
'na chianca grandi pe' 'na gucceria,  
e poi cu scagghi, scagghioli e scagghitti  
fici un vascello e lu mandai in Turchia."*

*(I saw an old spindle of an old woman. It wasn't broken but it barely held together. From half of it I got three windmill poles, a big bench for a butcher shop, and then, with the pieces that were left over I built a ship and sent it to Turkey.)*

A chorus of praise rose from the table. Mariuzza smiled merrily, like a child.

"Come ahead, come ahead," said Cuscunà. "I have done my part. If anyone can, let him beat me." And he twanged the strings of his guitar.

"Go on, Bruno," said Rocco, turning to Varvaro, "you were once a poet. Have you forgotten everything you ever knew, per la malogna?"

"In his day he could beat them all," said Caterina proudly, "making up songs on the bagpipe. No one could touch him in the whole countryside."

"Come on, Bruno. Courage!"

Varvaro got up. His wrinkled chin, hard and square as though cut out by an adze, was all shiny with grease and his gray eyes glittering like enameled flowers. Holding his glass in his hand, which trembled a little, he improvised his verse in a sharp falsetto.

## ENOUGH

*“Ed eu vitti l’ancinu di ’ssa ’ngagghia  
attru non c’è per fari la parigghia.  
Sette vommari fici di sta tagghia,  
quattro ’ncujni grossi e ’na manigghia.  
E dopu mi restau puru ’na scagghia  
fici ’na ferruvia di cento migghia.”*

*(I saw the hook of your spindle—there isn’t another any where as small as it. I got out of it seven plowshares as big as this, four big anvils, and a clevis. With a piece that was left over I built a railroad that was a hundred miles long.)*

Cuscunà was beaten. Glasses were raised amid a tumultuous chorus of applause. “Evviva, Varvaro! You’ve won, you’ve won. Viva Varvaro!”

It was already night. The bride and groom took their leave of the guests and retired to the room prepared for them in their uncle’s house, while at table the drinking and the competition went on.

## CHAPTER XII

MARIUZZA entered the bridal chamber with the agitated soul of the young girl who desires to know and yet is afraid, and who is already weighed down by the mysterious, long-dreamed sweet-ness—the perfume of love and the promise of maternity. But Gèsu entered as though into a tribunal or a church, with a terrible sin on his conscience.

Before the vast, high bed, with its fragrance of home-spun linen and straw, like the corner of a field, and with his young wife beside him, in whose trembling he defined desire and elation at the coming embrace, there flashed into his mind and crawled through his flesh the terrible memories of another embrace. The memory of his initiation into the mysterious thrill that is the possession of a woman was brutally awakened. He lived over again in a second of time the three days of stormy passion that had weakened him, leaving his whole being empty. He saw again, with the clarity of an hallucination, the insatiable flesh of that woman, the softness and warmth of her

## ENOUGH

limbs, the scent of her body, her serpent-green eyes, and all the perversions of her lust. Seized by sudden desire, he took his wife's hands in his and sought her mouth avidly. But at the touch of her rigid body, which exhaled the healthy odor of fresh linen and youthful flesh, he stopped, confused and deluded. His act of turbid passion seemed a profanation.

All the fears concerning his health and the terrible, warning words of the American doctor rushed into his mind. In his profound and delicate love for this innocent girl, who abandoned herself to him like a dove, a deep and tender pity swelled his heart. Something like the fear of an evil act or an incestuous desire held him back. He felt an irresistible need of confessing everything, of revealing all his fears to this woman who was not yet his, because he felt that out of her goodness would come infallible counsel of goodness and truth.

“Mariuzza,” he said, “I must talk to you.”

He took her by the hand and drew her to the window, a little window with a balcony that looked toward the west. Under it was a chest filled with linen. They sat down on it, hand in hand. Mariuzza trembled.

“I must make a confession to you and tell you a secret.”

“Tell me, then. Tell me,” said Mariuzza, disturbed. Gèsu hesitated and passed his hand across his fore-

## OF DREAMS

head. "I want to tell you— Listen to me.—I— In America—in America, I knew a woman."

Mariuzza's hands shook within his. "And why do you tell me that now? I don't ask anything of you. I don't want to know." And she leaned against his shoulder.

"No—listen to me," continued Gèsu, excited. "You must listen to me. I am not telling you this to make you jealous or to make you cry. I am telling you for another reason. I knew a woman who, in three days, ate up all my youth."

"So then you still remember her—and the thought of her pursues you? Then why did you marry me?"

"I remember her, but not through love. Through fear!"

"Fear of what?" asked the girl, almost angry.

"A terrible fear, my dearest, a terrible fear! I fear that she has given me an ugly sickness."

Mariuzza was seized by the repulsive shiver of one who, walking through the country, suddenly comes upon a swarming carcass.

"You have an ugly sickness? Oh, Santa Vergine! And how? What is the matter? How do you feel?" asked Mariuzza, confused and fearful, unable to understand what this thing could be. "But now you are all right. Why do you still feed on fear? Oh, poor me!"

"Don't cry. Listen to me," answered Gèsu. "When

## ENOUGH

I got home I was sicker than I am now, I was as weak and empty as a reed. I told my father about it and he took me to Mico del Re—you know—the man who is a magician. My father was afraid it was witchcraft, but there wasn't any spell. 'If you have any disease,' said Mico del Re, 'your marriage will cure you. The blood of a virgin cures every sickness caused by woman.' You, then, will be able to cure me. Will you, my dear?"

"I?" asked the girl, trying to see into his eyes. "I can cure you? How? Tell me how—I will do it. But you are trembling, your hands are cold, and yet the night is warm. Why do you tremble so? Why are you afraid?"

"No, I'm not trembling! If you will cure me, I shall not tremble again, my little one. Will you cure me with your blood."

"Yes, I am willing. I am here for that," sobbed Mariuzza. "If my blood is sufficient, take it. I am as pure as an angel, because no man ever laid a hand on me. But there is nothing the matter with you. These are just ideas you have—or rather, it's the memory of that foreign woman, that devil, that haunts you. Tell me, isn't that it? Swear to me that it isn't."

"No, Mariuzza," exclaimed Gèsu, in a tone of utmost sincerity, "it isn't that. I swear it. I am afraid for

## OF DREAMS

you! But you are willing to cure me—you will cure me. Isn't it true, that you will cure me?"

"Yes, my dear," said Mariuzza, and caressed his cheek with a sweet, maternal gesture. They embraced in silence.

The April night was sweet and warm and filled with the far-off running of waters and the gentle sighing of the sea. Small voices and a whispering of wings rose and fell in the silence of the fields. The air was heavy with the scent of grasses. The feet of small nocturnal animals made a fleeting rustle of leaves and soft noises of stirred earth as they passed through the thickets around a nearby rock. In the garden sang the little horned owl, the melancholy poet of southern nights, and his voice, now far, now near, was as sweet as the note of a reed pipe.

Overcome by the sweetness of the hour, comforted, hoping and believing in their happiness, hand in hand they gazed at the mountains. Aspromonte and the nearby peaks profiled in an opal-green sky took on a deep violet shade, and seemed, against the luminous background, the boundary of a heaven where angels walked on a carpet of green grass and flowers. Under the mountain, in a smiling valley, amid a forest of age-old chestnuts beside a river, the Madonna of Polsi had her shrine. And as from the foot of the mountain

## ENOUGH

gushed the perennial stream, so from Her sanctuary, throughout the province and beyond, gushed the perennial fountain of grace upon the afflicted, the sick and the poor.

“Let us make a vow,” said Mariuzza, with sudden joy. “Let us turn to the Madonna. She will listen to us.”

“Yes,” whispered Gèsu, pressing her close to him. “You promise the Madonna what you think fit, and I accept. And may She hear our vows.”

Mariuzza took his arms from around her, and falling on her knees before the window with her eyes and her soul reaching toward the distant sanctuary, she prayed.

“Oh Virgin of the Mountain, You Who are the fountain of all grace, give back health to my husband, and I promise You to come this year with him and to bring You all the gold of our wedding. Cure him, blessed Madonna, and make him forget the foreign woman, that woman—that woman—that woman—” She broke into sobs and leaned her head on the chest.

Gèsu, touched and saddened, raised her and drew her silently to him. Then they closed the window.

## CHAPTER XIII

**A**ND so May came. Not a corner of a field, nor the edge of a road nor a fallen wall nor a roof was without its flower, its tuft of grass and its nest. April had been damp, with days of gentle, even rain. It fell from a leaden sky in the warm, soft air, through days already long, lazy and sleep-inducing. The rain swished on the tall grass, on the flowering beans in the gardens, and on the grain, pushing it up in the slight rise and fall of the wind. It dripped gently from the rosy petals of the peach and apple trees. It opened the bright poppy buds in the emerald green of the wheat, and it watered the vines that wept on the hills, crowned with clear clouds, shining like meteors.

The Calabrian proverb says that in March every mastic is a bed, every clump of shrubbery a mattress. And in truth the hedges were exuberant that year, tender and soft like couches for the loves of forest gods. The briar patches, the mastic, the pear trees, the spurges, the hawthorn, the tamarisk—everything was overflowing with a shining and rank foliage. From

## ENOUGH

the walls and the eaves hung festoons of wall flowers and Canterbury bells. Under every rock, in every quarry, were tufts of bloom—golden daisies, narcissi, wood-sorrel, hyacinths, white star of Bethlehem, violet lords-and-ladies, and everywhere the violet borage and yellow buttercups shining like enamel. They covered the paths and the walls, the ditches and the edges of the fields, the knobs on the sandstone and the pastures. The days were gentle and sweet. One seemed to breathe a perfume of wild honey and milk. A healthy warmth like vegetable ferment entered the blood and made it clean.

Gèsu and Mariuzza were happy. He had regained his appetite, his confidence, and the somewhat sentimental joyfulness that was part of his timid character. Of his sickness there remained only some fatigue, and that was easily attributed to the weather. During the month of April he sometimes went into the fields with his wife to prop up the beans or to clear the grain, but more often he stayed at home to rest, to enjoy the pleasant idleness of the luminous springtime and the titbits that Mariuzza prepared for him. Her complexion grew rosy, and every day she grew a bit fatter and her eyes took on a new splendor and a bolder, harder expression. Following her husband's example she, too, became lazy, for it was pleasant to be with him on those first days of the honeymoon, with all the birds

## OF DREAMS

pursuing one another over the roofs and the subdued chirping in the nests under the eaves.

Sometimes they went to Bony. There, seated under a pear tree with their backs against the trunk, brimming over with happiness, they enjoyed the landscape which was always beautiful and always new, even to their accustomed eyes. In the garden Rocco weeded the beans of broomrape and nettles. His old donkey, tied to a tree, with her nearly bald ears continually in motion and big red sores covered with flies, looked at them with the big, damp eyes of a resigned old woman, and blew, now and then, through her nostrils.

The lush grain made a wide wave at the slightest breath. The fields, filled with flowers, seemed like purple carpets. The barley was already bearded, and it sparkled in the sun like green gold. Around the pear and apple trees, with the buds just turning into fruit, hummed thousands of bees and hairy hornets and wasps with long legs yellow as the yolk of an egg, which, flying from the dead flowers, made the dead leaves fall. The sparrows, the tits, the goldfinches and the blackbirds were building nests by the thousands in the olives, in the hedges and in the elms, and they wove in and out through the bright air all day long. At times, during the noonday calm, big crows passed over head in high and solemn flight, uttering their hoarse cries. They wheeled high over the hills, swept

## ENOUGH

down rapidly, rested a moment on their wings, then rose again in wide spirals, their feathers shining in the sun like blue steel.

“How nice it is here,” whispered Gèsu to his wife, running his hands lovingly through her hair. “Can it be really true that you have cured me? I feel so well that my blood seems as sweet as milk.”

“The Madonna has cured you,” answered Mariuzza, “the Madonna of Polsi, the Blessed Virgin of the Mountain. Remember my vow. This year we must both go to thank her.”

“We shall go,” said Gèsu. “I have accepted your vow.”

Under the peak of Aspromonte they saw, dim in the midday calm, the valley with the miraculous Sanctuary of Polsi.

One noon, while they lay happily in the shade, the sweet, mocking song of a cuckoo came suddenly from a hedge. “Cuckoo—cuckoo—cuckoo.” It sang three notes and then it was silent.

“Wait,” said Mariuzza. “Now I shall ask him a question. Let’s see what he says. My pretty cuckoo, in how many years will I marry?”

The bird was silent a moment. Then it replied with its usual three notes, “Cuckoo—cuckoo—cuckoo.”

## OF DREAMS

“Stupid bird,” laughed Mariuzza. “He doesn’t even know that I’m already married.”

“And how do you expect him to know? You didn’t send him any sugar-plums.”

“But the birds know everything. They still talk with the angels in the Garden of Eden. Now I shall ask him something else. My pretty cuckoo, how many years will I enjoy my husband?”

The cuckoo answered again with three notes.

“Oh, an evil Easter take you!” exclaimed the irate Mariuzza. “Three years!”

“He probably means thirty,” laughed Gèsu.

“And even if it were thirty—what are thirty years? We are young and can enjoy each other much longer than that.”

“But why do you think he knows anything? He always answers in the same way.”

“That may be, but sometimes he guesses right. At Grappidà almost every day I asked a fine cuckoo perched in a big oak tree, ‘My pretty cuckoo, in how many years will I get married?’ and he answered me with three notes. And after three years I got married to you.”

“Wait,” said Gèsu. “Now I’ll ask him something.” And in a loud voice he asked the bird, “My golden cuckoo, how many years before I die?”

The cuckoo uttered a single, frightened note, took

## ENOUGH

flight, and disappeared between a pear tree and the hedge. Gèsu and Mariuzza looked at one another.

“One year!” exclaimed Mariuzza, angry. “May a bullet hit you in the wings, you wicked bird!” And she embraced her husband tenderly, covering him with her breast as if to defend him from the evil omen.

## CHAPTER XIV

WITH the first of June, during the reaping of the barley, Mariuzza was seized by several heavy attacks of fever, which left her exhausted. They thought it was sunstroke, particularly because in the great heat she had worked a half-hour now and then without a kerchief on her head. Caterina always wore a big straw hat when she worked in the fields, but Mariuzza could not get one to fit her because of the big tresses that bound her head. The fevers were accompanied by terrible stabbing pains and by intermittent headaches which left her in a stupor. They gave her quinine and a broth of purgative herbs that Rocco gathered in his garden at Bony.

The fever disappeared, but the headache remained, and, especially at night, became so severe that poor Mariuzza thought she would go mad. It seemed as though her brain were being cut in slices or as though a demoniac auger was boring deep holes in her skull. On the days that followed these attacks, she was numb, inert, breathless, unable even to articulate, and a sickly

## ENOUGH

sleepiness muddled her thoughts. Her eyes were sore and could hardly open, and they seemed to grow tired if she looked at anything, even for a moment.

The weather became hotter and hotter. Summer had come—the terrible, dry, thirsty, dusty summer, that gives a dirty yellow color to the whole land and oppresses the heart. The grain was already blond and in certain places the ears took on the reddish color of rust. The grasses were all dry, the fields desolate, with piled-up bean stalks, blackened in the sun, scattered here and there along the furrows. The few tenacious tufts of green, and the blue flowers of the endive, star-shaped and delicate, only accentuated the desolation of the scene. In the dried river beds the rocks and boulders smoked in the sun like bread in an oven. The air was dead, the sky yellow, the sea violet. At noon the sultriness cut off the breath.

When one looked at the fields at noon he was assailed by a panicky uneasiness. It seemed as if the world would catch fire and smoulder away like cotton waste dipped in alcohol. The distant stretches were veiled in a murky halo of light and dusty vapor. The big oaks, the pear and apple trees, sonorous with locusts, stood motionless in the punishing heat. The olive trees, with their dusty, withered leaves, gave an impression of death.

Noisy flocks of crows passed through the sky all day

## OF DREAMS

long, hovering in wide circles over the ravines in search of carrion, the carrion of mad dogs, or of smitten cattle. Mariuzza went no more to the country. Her headaches kept her beaten down, stunned, and left her for days at a time helpless, her eyes dull and half-closed, and her mind empty. She spent the days squatted before the door of the house, listening to the quivering in the nests under the eaves and the buzzing in the beehives under the rafters.

Since she also had bad spells of nausea, Aunt Caterina thought of pregnancy and rejoiced in the girl's sufferings, as a rosy sign of promise. She talked to Mariuzza about it, making fun of her a little in an affectionate way.

"Didn't you know that you had to go along that road? You should have known. It's a road you have to travel. You are lucky to have this suffering, in order to have fruit of your flesh. Look at me—I never had that fortune. I never suffered nausea or headaches or other indispositions, and I die without leaving a drop of my blood in this world. If we had not taken you in we should have died without a hand to close our eyes."

"Do you really think it is that?" asked Mariuzza, with a flash of joy in her tired eyes. "Oh, I should be so happy. But I suffer so much! You know that some mornings I can't see at all? I seem to have a blanket in

## ENOUGH

front of my eyes. Oh, poor me—how long does this thing last?"

"Courage, my daughter. It lasts a long time."

Mariuzza couldn't be comforted, although she was happy, and she watched continually for some revealing sign of her maternity.

When Rocco was told by Caterina, he jumped out of his skin for joy. When he returned from the reaping in the evening, black, sunburned, with peace on his big, bronze face, the first thing he did was to go to see Mariuzza and to take her the fine fruit he had gathered in his orchard. He caressed her with his eyes. Almost it seemed to him that if he touched her he would break the rhythm of that happy incipient maternity, and he watched her with raised hands as he might watch a nest in which the little eggs rested in the soft bed of feathers or dandelion fluff.

"Well, well! How are you, Mariuzza?" he asked with a smile as he gently raised from a wicker basket a fig or a cluster of grapes. "Look what I brought you!"

One evening there would be figs of the first harvest, long and shining as an egg-plant. Another time it would be the little pears of St. Vitus or muscatel grapes as fragrant as a sweetmeat, or cherries.

"Eat one of them and your headache will go away."

"Put them there," Mariuzza would say, attempting to smile. "I have no desire for them now."

## OF DREAMS

“Why haven’t you any desire? If you look at them you’ll soon get a desire. Women in your condition have all desires. And you know why? Because the little souls they have inside them come from the Garden of Eden, where there are all the fruits of the world, and they are accustomed to eat their fill of them. Do you know the story of the guardian friar? Ah, you don’t. I’ll tell it to you—I’ll make you laugh a little.”

And he told her of a pregnant woman who, seeing the guardian of a monastery pass her house every day, finally had a desire to eat a piece of his cheek. When the friar heard of the woman’s wish he raised his eyebrows and answered, “No, I can’t allow it. The honor of my face is at stake.” But then, thinking that the little soul might die and go to Limbo if he didn’t consent to make that sacrifice, he went to see the woman and said to her, “Well, I have decided to satisfy you. Come and bite off a piece wherever you wish.” The friar was rosy, fat and well-fed, and the woman bit into him voluptuously. But she did not complete her bite. She remained thus, with her mouth near his, and soon her desire passed away.

Mariuzza laughed. “Gesù! Gesù! Don’t make me laugh when I don’t want to.”

“Eat, per la malogna, and tell me if you want anything. Tell me—do you understand? Don’t make

## ENOUGH

botch-work of this, now. Don't serve me up the egg before its time."

But in the house was one who did not take part in the common rejoicing, who did not believe in the pregnancy of Mariuzza, and who saw her suffer with an anxiety that gnawed at his heart. It was Gèsu.

As the work in the fields was pressing, during the reaping Gèsu was away all day long, although the pains in his bones and the fatigue had laid hold of him again. He worked beside his father and Bruno. They were all happy and loquacious in the fields, and sang in contests with the gleaners. They ate heartily, and the boldest told salacious stories, at which the girls who gathered the sheaves ran away. Gèsu never sang, but he worked madly, always first in the row. His heart was filled with a tragic tormenting suspicion, and his thoughts were fixed like a nail on his wife and her illness. In the evening he returned home exhausted, sad and heavy-hearted.

Sometimes in the night, when Mariuzza suffered, with a vinegar-soaked handkerchief on her forehead, he made a light and stood in long contemplation of her, with a lump in his throat that strangled him. With one hand under her cheek on the pillow, her head thrown back, abandoned like a wounded dove, her

## OF DREAMS

mouth half open, and her hair, her beautiful long hair, coiled on the pillow in two big tresses like two loving serpents, Mariuzza would whimper and seek her husband with her free hand, groping as if for help and support.

“How do you feel, my dearest?” asked Gèsu, kissing her on the cheek. “Do you feel so bad?”

Mariuzza answered with a low complaining, like a drunken woman. She was unable to open her eyes.

Her suffering almost sent Gèsu raving mad. His wife had cured him, but the terrible sickness had passed to her. The putrid germ of casual love, the poison of sin, the corrupt pollen of the poisonous flower, the deadly fermentation that came from the great, clutching cities, generated in the brothels, in the seaports, in the stormy atmosphere of Babylonian streets, had settled upon the fresh, innocent flesh of his young wife, and had rotted it.

“Pardon, pardon,” whispered Gèsu, dismayed and desperate. “Pardon, my poor little wife. I have killed you—I have poisoned you. Pardon me, pardon me.”

The saddest and most disordered plans came to him. He wanted to punish himself with his own hands—to torture himself, like a pitiless judge who carries out his own sentence. Then he thought of running away, like a madman, with a sack on his shoulder and a stick in his hand, wandering from door to door and from

## ENOUGH

village to village like those beggars who have neither home nor loved ones nor name nor resting place, and eat crusts of bread that they beg from the left-overs of the kitchen, and sleep on the bank of a ditch, on the steps of a church, under the porticos of old abandoned convents, and die in a corner in a bit of shade cast by a solitary wall while the lizards watch with their little mysterious eyes in which is the supreme indifference of nature.

He dared not call a doctor, lest his dreadful suspicions be confirmed. Instead he tried ceaselessly to get an idea of what this terrible disease was that had no exact form and wore away life and poisoned the blood like a malediction from the Most High. He recalled what he had heard of the terrible effects of certain diseases that made the limbs rot, upset the reason, befogged the eyes and opened fetid sores a foot and a half long that never healed. The thought that this evil came from the functioning of the original sin, gave to its effects the mystical significance of irreparable punishment. It awed him.

June went and July came, hotter and more desolate than ever. For two months not a cloud had been seen in the sky. At sunset a few cloudy streaks disappeared in the furnace of twilight. The figs were ripening and would have to be looked after. The Varvaros had a

## OF DREAMS

garden of fig trees, and at the first of the month they moved there with Gèsu and Mariuzza.

Aunt Caterina was of the opinion that the country air would help Mariuzza in the painful maturing of her fruit. For Caterina had no doubt—the girl was a mother. And all her sickness was only the effect of her particular state of grace.

The farm faced the sea and it was beautiful in spite of the fact that everything was dried out by the sun. The vineyard gave promise, and already the grapes were turning black. In the first few days Mariuzza seemed to enjoy a truce. Her head still ached now and then, but less violently. What bothered her most was the great weakness in her eyes. The terrible headaches had left her sight clouded. She saw everything darkly, as if she looked out through a fine sieve.

Another thing worried her. Little eruptions came on her arms and her breast, pale and hard and almost painless, and then they disappeared, leaving white spots on the flesh, somewhat like burns. A big boil came on her neck under her left ear, with a bothersome itching. Caterina told her to bathe it with saliva in the morning before eating, because saliva had miraculous powers for these things. Then her headaches returned, more violent than ever. Varvaro advised the application of two leeches to her temples, but the ef-

## ENOUGH

fects were disastrous. Her sight weakened to such an extent that they could no longer keep from going to a doctor.

Toward the end of July Gèsu loaded Mariuzza on a donkey, because she was no longer able to walk, and took her to Bovalino Marina, where, a short time before, Doctor La Cava had arrived from Rome, for the bathing. He took with him two cockerels and a basket of fruit, because in Calabria one never goes to a doctor or a lawyer with empty hands.

The doctor, a man of about forty-five, dark, clean shaven, affable, with a delicate nose and almost feminine hands, led them into his consultation room.

"I have come to you," said Gèsu, his face pale with guilt, "because my wife is about to lose her sight."

"Sit down," the doctor ordered Mariuzza, paying no attention to her husband.

After lifting up her lids and examining her eyes, he looked carefully at the boil under her ear and at one of the pale eruptions. He felt her, passed his fingers under her jaws, and gave Gèsu a terrible glance, but without saying a word.

"Am I pregnant, doctor?" asked Mariuzza weakly, almost with shame.

"God forbid," answered the doctor, and continued his examination.

"Why, doctor?" asked the bewildered Mariuzza. A

## OF DREAMS

great hope vanished, the hope that her pains were due to the preparation of a new being. With that thought she had been able to bear her sufferings with resignation, almost with contentment. Without it her sickness would be unbearable.

The doctor told her to undress. The poor girl wept for shame, because she never dreamed of letting any man but her husband see her. The doctor frowned and scolded. Faced with the pitiable spectacle of youthful flesh invaded by the terrible disease even he had lost his fine, socratic calm. Her belly and her breast were spotted with little ulcers and wine-colored marks. The doctor looked at her a moment, then told her to dress.

“Have you been in America?” he asked Gèsu.

“Yes, doctor.”

“How long have you been married?”

“Since the month of April.”

“Were you ever sick in America?”

“Once, about a year ago. Then I got completely well.”

“Didn’t you take treatments?”

“No, doctor, I’m all right now.”

“Sure,” said the doctor, with an ironical smile. “So is your wife all right. When I finish consultations, come into my study and I will give you a prescription.” And he showed them to the door.

A few hours later, when Gèsu left the doctor’s study,

## ENOUGH

he had the face of a corpse. He staggered like a drunken man, shamed, degraded, without even the courage to lift his eyes from the ground.

The doctor had assailed him with fierce reproofs, drawing him a terrible picture of his and his wife's condition, especially his wife's, in whom the disease was most virulent. He ordered for both of them drops and injections to be taken with the greatest care and regularity.

About noon Mariuzza was put on the donkey again and they started back to the farm. In the almost tragic solitude of the countryside not a human sound was heard. The sun, shining down from the center of the heavens, burned the earth, and from it rose a trembling vapor, as if from a furnace. The locusts sang by the thousands in every plant, in every hedge, in every tree, an immense chorus that finally was no longer heard, as we no longer hear the noises of factories when our ears are accustomed to them.

Mariuzza, with her hair tumbling on her shoulders and a yellow handkerchief on her head, with her mouth burning and her eyes aching from the reflection of the light on the ground, tried to question her husband, but she could only mutter a few syllables, her internal torment cut off the words in her mouth.

The old donkey blew noisily through her nostrils, delayed now and then to nibble at a flower, and rubbed

## OF DREAMS

against the hedges, seeking even a fleeting corner of shade. Her steps fell in the silence like stones in a dried river-bed. Snakes sleeping under the hedges or basking in the sun on the big rocks raised their heads and crossed the path in front of them with a long hissing and then disappeared into the thickets.

Mariuzza was oppressed. The certainty that she was not with child had plunged her into gloom. She was then really sick of the mysterious disease that her husband had brought home from America, the disease of the predatory wolf, the foreign woman. And why did the Lord punish them thus, her and her poor husband? She could not conceive even a shadow of animosity toward her man, to whom she clung desperately, in spite of everything. Dimly she saw him walking along beside the donkey, bent over like an old man, with his face streaked with sweat and his eyes frightened. A feeling of maternal pity bent her toward him, and she forgot her pain to consider his, who suffered because he held himself the cause of all the tragic unhappiness that had struck down their lives.

“Gèsu, why don’t you speak? What did the doctor say?”

“What did he say?” repeated Gèsu, with his face wrenched in mental torment. “What did he tell me?” He couldn’t go on.

“Oh God! Don’t despair, Gèsu. Have faith in God.

## ENOUGH

We have made a vow to the Madonna of the Mountain. I have faith in Her. We shall go there in September and pray for a miracle. But don't torture yourself like this. Be calm, for the love of me. Will you, Gèsu—tell me, will you?"

Gèsu looked into her eyes. Those dear eyes which had the mottled colors of the seashore under a veil of water were now clouded, suffering, without splendor. In order not to distress her he nodded. But he wished he was under the earth.

## CHAPTER XV

**A**ND so they went to the Madonna of the Mountain.

The feast day came on the third of September, but already, by the middle of August, crowds of the faithful passed by, coming from every corner of the province, and going to the miraculous shrine that the piety of the faithful had constructed ages before at the foot of Aspromonte.

Many went there before the feast for a fortnight of purification and because they lived on the charity of the sanctuary. They drank the water of the springs, prayed, and rested in the shade of the walnut trees in the stupendous solitude, into which the sky opened, serene and immutable, like a door into eternity.

The sanctuary, now raised to an abbey through the diligence of Monsignor Míttiga, was then only a dependent church of the diocese of Gerace, governed by a prior and served for the quests for alms by a restricted body of secular friars who went around the province, as they still do, riding their handsome mules and collecting the offerings of the faithful.

## ENOUGH

Everyone gave to the Madonna, and the Madonna gave to everyone on her feast day. Her storehouses were public fountains at which the pilgrims drew their supplies. There was no threshing-floor on which the hermit of Polsi, after the straw had been removed, did not find his quarter measure put aside for the Blessed Virgin of the Mountain. After Christmas the friars made the rounds of the houses, wearing their robes of coarse wool and the copper plaque with the effigy of the Madonna on their breasts, distributing little pots of terra cotta, used for collecting from the big kettles at carnival time the lard of the pig that every well-off family slaughters at home for the needs of the coming year. They left two or more of these pots to each family, according to its importance and wealth, and during Lent came back again to take them, filled with grease, for the use of the convent and to assist pilgrims at the time of the feast.

In the towns through which they passed in the quest for alms the friars made many friendships, especially among the peasants, to whom they gave tobacco, receiving in return food, sweet-smelling fruit and warm hospitality. So, when the pilgrims came to the sanctuary for the nine days preceding the festival, or for the festival itself, they sought out the friar whom they knew and were helped in every way, with the most affectionate and solicitous cordiality.

## OF DREAMS

The sanctuary itself was not very ancient, but popular legends spoke of a refuge of anchorites in the solitary valley before its time. According to the golden story of the *Reali di Francia*, a certain Pope Silvestro came to Aspromonte, to that remote valley shaded by magnificent walnut trees, fleeing before the anger and persecution of the still-pagan Emperor Constantine, who was trying to destroy the Holy Faith. The emperor was a leper and kept consulting the pagan doctors for ways of freeing himself from his affliction, but none of them could prescribe a remedy. And behold, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him three times in a dream and said to him, "One water alone can cleanse you, and it is guarded by Pope Silvestro in Aspromonte." It was the water of the Baptism, the water of the Sacred Purification, which had selected a corner of the Blessed Mountain for its refuge. According to another popular legend, Guerino il Meschino found lodging and advice among certain holy hermits in Aspromonte while he was on his heroic journey, before he went to the lands of Prester John. And all these remote and hoary legends conferred on the sanctuary a halo of veneration.

Its fame as a worker of miracles spread through the whole province and beyond. Its very location, in the middle of the mountains, among the snows, made it seem nearer Heaven and the elements and the origi-

## ENOUGH

nal forces, which had a potent effect upon the mystical and imaginative minds of the people, and contributed to the faith in the marvelous tales of the miracles performed annually by the Madonna. The tales were full of faith. Every year eight or ten were benefited by the miracle—blind who had regained their sight—dumb who spoke—cripples who regained the use of their limbs—those with incurable diseases—all returned whole and strong, singing the praises of the Virgin.

All the pilgrims had been present, and had seen these things with their own eyes. They had heard with their ears the words of the dumb who had regained speech, had supported the cripples who now walked, and had comforted the sick who now were cured, and they described them, and knew their villages and their relatives and the misfortunes which led them to unhappiness, and through unhappiness to grace. Those who had not really been present at the miracles affirmed them with the same sure and unshakable faith.

The relatives of Gèsu and Mariuzza went with them to the Madonna to obtain grace. Toward the end of August Mariuzza became completely blind. A tenacious, gray film, a sort of mucous incrustation, covered the mottled irises of her gentle eyes. The Varvaros had no peace. Bruno aged ten years and Caterina, always so brisk and smiling, always in motion like a wagtail, was now almost unrecognizable. She hovered all day

## OF DREAMS

long around Mariuzza, who was no longer able to take a step unless led by the hand. They placed her in a chair under a tree, and moved her with the shadow.

Gèsu kept to himself like a guilty man in search of expiation. He went away, with the excuse of cutting wood or braiding rope or gathering ferns to cover the vines. He went deep into the ravines, into the most solitary places, where the partridges built their nests among the mastic and juniper. And there, with gloomy eyes and a heavy heart and an enfeebled will, he meditated and talked to himself, as mad men do. And sometimes, to relieve himself of his mental torment, he sang. He sang the Lamentation from Jeremiah with a lugubrious lengthening of the notes that broke his heart.

Rocco had to take care of his figs at Bony, and every so often he came to see Mariuzza, half fainting with fatigue, but with his usual basket of fruit to offer her. And every day he suggested a new remedy or a new consultation with this or that expert in the neighbourhood. He had no faith in doctors. There were a hundred complicated diseases that he did not understand and therefore he would not admit of their existence. Moreover, no one had told him what the doctor really said. Gèsu had given only vague hints about the medicine and Mariuzza absolutely refused to let anyone blame her husband. Her love was so blind and so

## ENOUGH

heroic that she took an aggressive attitude even to Gèsu himself, when, in the privacy of their room, he blamed himself and asked her pardon.

"If you love me you must never say that to me again," she said to him, holding her arms tight around his neck. "You have nothing to do with it. The Lord has punished me and the Lord will cure me. Have we not made a vow to the Madonna of Polsi to go to her this year? We will go. Her festival is approaching. Put all the gold of our marriage on me and take me to Her. You will see that She will take pity on me. You will see—you will see."

The Blèfaris made ready to set out for the festival at midnight of the first of September, in order to make the journey when it was cool. They would arrive at Polsi the following morning. The way was long—about ten hours of travel through river beds and over mountain paths—and the days were still torrid. They would have to arrive at the foot of the mountain, at least, in the early hours of the morning. Mariuzza would ride Rocco's old donkey, for in spite of her eighteen years she was still as full of daring as her owner.

Toward nightfall on the first of September Rocco arrived at the Varvaros' farm, and Pietro was with

## OF DREAMS

him. He had returned unexpectedly with ten other emigrants. Dressed in blue cheviot, with a gold chain, a dazzling necktie, a hat and yellow shoes, he looked like a different person. His long, horsey face, sunburned and somewhat fuller, had taken on the frank and self-possessed expression of a man who has learned to run his own life and to look the world in the face.

The Varvaros embraced him with emotion. When Gèsu saw him he wept like a child. They took him to Mariuzza who was sitting on a big log in front of the house under a pomegranate tree. The sun had set and the horizon in the west was a splash of gold. When Pietro spoke to her, her face lit up with joy for a moment and then tears came.

“Oh Pietro, Pietro, where are you?” and she sought him with her hands. “Look, what a state I am in—I can’t even see you. And how are you, Pietro?”

“Oh, what else is lacking to complete my misfortunes!” exclaimed Pietro, his voice thick with emotion. He kissed Mariuzza on the cheeks. “And how did this happen? What does the doctor say?”

“What do you expect the doctor to know?” asked Mariuzza quickly, as if she feared to have someone else answer this delicate question. “The true doctor is the Madonna. Aren’t you coming with us to the Madonna, Pietro? Aren’t you coming?”

## ENOUGH

"I returned from America on purpose," answered Pietro. "I, too, have a vow for the Madonna."

"Oh, how glad I am," exclaimed Mariuzza. "How glad I am. You are a good omen, Pietro, and you will see that the Madonna will take pity on you."

He looked at her with great tenderness and frowned to hide the emotion that filled him.

At midnight they departed. They tied a bag of hay to the pack-saddle, put a cushion on the hay, and placed Mariuzza on top. She wore her wedding clothes and all the gold of the marriage.

The road for a certain distance penetrated deep into a gully, shaded by great oaks and scattered with big rocks. The donkey stumbled continually, its hoofs beating dully on the stones. Mariuzza rocked in the saddle and was in constant danger of falling. Gèsu and Pietro walked beside her to support her.

They traveled in silence. The shadow of the oaks weighed down their spirits like a funeral veil. From the nearby hedges came the rustling of leaves and the buzzing of insects, long and tremulous. Dormice hissed and scrambled over the rough bark in the branches above their heads. After half an hour they came into the open. The gully gave place to the wider bed of

## OF DREAMS

the river. They raised their eyes to the heavens in relief.

The night was beautiful—a southern summer night, fantastic and spectacular. The sky was so filled with minute stars that it gave the impression of a snowfall halted in mid air and held motionless against a background of limpid sky. The constellations were indistinguishable in the immense swarm and the heavens were transformed into a gigantic milky way from one end of the horizon to the other, a river of powdered diamonds. So bright was the light of the stars that one could see plainly, as under a full moon. And as the sky arched over the world like a great embroidered pavilion, the earth flattened itself out, and the hills, the forests, the violet mountains became soft and indistinct, like folds of velvet. The valley was a great cup whose irregular rim was the profile of the mountains and whose bottom was the river bed—a cup raised by a mystic hand toward Heaven like an offering to the Lord of the dawn and of the sunset, of the tempests and the starry nights.

The air was full of thin, distant clamor, as indistinct as an echo of running waters. On the hills toward Natile and San Luca, along the road that led to the sanctuary, moving torches gleamed. At times the vast silence was broken by the distant sound of shots fol-

## ENOUGH

lowed by shouting, muted in the distance. "Viva Maria!" The pilgrims were shooting into the air, according to custom, in honor of the Virgin. Singing came through the night. The legends of the sanctuary, the rhapsodies composed by the people concerning its most famous miracles, were being told in song, with a slow and stately rhythm that rose from the depths of the heart.

One song celebrated the first miracle, the revelation of the Madonna of Polsi. One day a peasant was plowing the slopes of the blessed valley when he noticed that in a certain spot the plow would not move forward. He thought it had been caught in a tough root and tried to get it out. He could not move it. He urged his oxen with voice and goad, but they fell on their knees in adoration. Filled with mystic fear he unharnessed the oxen from the plow and began to dig around the plowshare. It had touched a statue of the Virgin which had remained buried in the ground from time immemorable. In that spot was built the miraculous shrine.

The far-off songs, the shots, the torches and the marvelous night comforted the pilgrims. They talked of the sanctuary of Polsi and of others in the province.

"Of all the Madonnas that there are in the churches," asked Caterina, "which one is the true Mother of God? We have our Madonna of Pandore, and then we have

## OF DREAMS

the black Madonna of Seminara, the Madonna of Polsi and the Madonna of Pugliano. Which is the true Mother of Jesus?"

"Ours is the oldest," answered Rocco, "and is the true Mother of Our Lord. The Madonnas of Polsi and Seminara are sisters, and the youngest of the sisters is the Immaculate Madonna."

"But how about the Madonna of Pugliano?"

"I think she is a sister, too, but I am not sure."

"The Madonna of Polsi works the most miracles, though."

And here they vied with one another in relating the extraordinary miracles performed by the Virgin of the Mountain. A man from Oppido Mamertina had been carried to the sanctuary by his parents. He had completely lost the use of his legs by a fall from a tree. The Madonna had cured him. Then there was a certain woman with a cancer in her womb. Doctors everywhere told her so. The Virgin of the Mountain cured her and a few months later she gave birth to a beautiful baby. And a man from Caraffa, who was blind, had regained his sight.

"Oh, Holy Virgin," prayed Mariuzza, raising her hands toward the point where she thought the sanctuary was. "You will have pity on me— You will have pity on me."

"Certainly she will, my poor child," said Caterina.

## ENOUGH

“I have made a vow to live on bread and water for all the Saturdays of my life, and my food on those days will go to the poor.”

Gèsu did not talk. He followed the road despondently beside the donkey with one hand holding his wife’s skirts. He had a queer feeling that his legs were cork. He no longer felt the soles of his feet. The sense of touch seemed to have vanished from him, so that he often lost his balance and took hold of the saddle to keep from falling.

Toward two o’clock they arrived on the plains of Flavia, before San Luca. On the steep and rocky slope where the town perched lights could be seen moving. Lamps winked through open windows, and in the darkness voices rose on the air singing to the accompaniment of the pipes.

They left the houses on their right and entered a vast orchard beside the bed of the River Bonamico. Water gurgled between shady banks on the edges of the grain fields. They passed in front of a big saw mill from which came the sonorous roar of a waterfall and with it the metallic scraping of the saws ringing against the wood like bells. The healthy odor of resin filled the mountain air. A few steps away two men and a woman, who carried a pine torch in her hand, stopped to wait for them when they heard their steps.

## OF DREAMS

“Come along, come along, paesani,” said the woman in a melodious voice, and she raised the sputtering torch. She was a beautiful young woman, strong and nimble as an Arab horse, with an oval face and a bold profile that shone in the reflection of a flame. She had an energetic manner of speaking, with the jerky inflections characteristic of the town. The two men were straight and stalwart and handsome.

“Salute!” called Rocco, touching his forehead.

“Salute e bene,” replied the three pilgrims. “What is your town?”

“We come from Pandore. We have a sick girl whom we take to the Virgin for a miracle.”

All three approached, looked at Mariuzza with curiosity, and sought in her pale, gentle face the signs of her sickness.

“What is the matter with her?” asked the woman, raising her torch. “What is the matter with you, my pretty girl?”

“She has lost her sight,” said Caterina, taking one of Mariuzza’s hands between her own. “She lost her sight barely six months after her marriage. She is my niece and this is her husband.”

The woman from San Luca was sympathetic. She commiserated with Mariuzza in her beautiful, musical voice and in her picturesque language, full of imagery and lyric flights, like a song. They went along together.

## ENOUGH

Now they entered the great valley of Polsi and the climb began, through the wide and desolate bed of the river. Here and there on the banks of the rocky pits among the clumps of oleanders the ashes of spent fires were seen. In one corner a mule without a saddle nibbled at a pile of hay. Beside it, with his shoulders leaning against the saddle and his feet stretched out among the stones, snored a red-faced man dressed hunter style in velvet.

Parties of pilgrims sang in the valley or along the upward path that twinkled with their lights, and the song and the shots resounded against the wall of trees and echoed through the mountains. The air was sharp, invigorating and sweet-scented.

The road now rose to the right of the river through a tangle of ilex and ferns. Below it the water splashed over the great rocks. Nocturnal birds fled screaming from the distant shots and the light of the torches. The sky was like an immense hive of golden bees. The rise was long and difficult. After a time they arrived at a level spot, in the middle of which was a huge threshing-floor surrounded by chestnut trees. Some fifty pilgrims, men and women, waited there for the dawn, for beyond the road was difficult and dangerous. They were seated on piles of straw on the edge of the floor, grouped according to the towns from which they came.

## OF DREAMS

“Let us stop, too,” said the woman from San Luca, who had used up her supply of pine chips. “Let us wait here for daylight.” They sat down in a corner.

Little by little the sky lost its stars and the milky light of night turned to a crystal transparency. To the east the sea looked, in the distance, like a great, dark awning. A red streak like the light from a forge divided the line of the water from a dense fog of rust and gray vapor that mingled its colors with that of the sky. The morning star trembled on the horizon like a lighthouse over a distant shore.

A group of women sitting by the Blèfaris began to sing the story of a wonderful miracle performed by the Madonna of Polsi in the early time of the sanctuary.

*E lu principi di Ruccella  
avia fattu nu bellu gutu.*

The Prince of Roccella Ionica, of the family of the Carafa of Naples, being without an heir, made a vow to the Virgin of the Mountain. If She would send him an heir from Heaven he would bring him, when he was a year old, to Her sanctuary, and would offer to Her as much gold as the baby weighed.

*Mi si manda nu bellu figghiolu:  
a capu all'anno si lu pisa d'oru.*

## ENOUGH

The Madonna heard the prince's prayer, and at the time of Her festival the princess gave birth to a beautiful child.

The women sang in a group, mouth facing mouth, raising their heads like chirping birds and lifting their breasts. The slow, sacred melody, perfectly intoned, seemed to emanate from the mountain, to come from the leaves, to become one with the voice of the forest.

"Let us sing, also," said the woman from San Luca to Mariuzza.

She started off in a limpid voice like the ringing of a silver bell. Everyone turned to look at her. Mariuzza joined her, with a heart filled with hope.

*Quandu arrivaru a Bovalino  
si moriu lu picculinu.*

The song went on. The prince, in fulfillment of his vow, at the end of the year brought his heir, with great pomp, to the Virgin. But half way on the road, at Bovalino, the child died. What should he do? Should he carry the dead child to the Madonna? The prince, as true as an ancient knight, carried the little corpse to the sanctuary, gave the promised weight in gold, and then placed the child on the altar in a little bier and asked that a litany be sung to the Madonna in gratitude. And wonder of wonders, when the litany was finished, the child awoke and cried: "Maria."

## OF DREAMS

*Mentre cantavano la litania  
lu picculinu chiamava Maria.*

Day came, luminous day of miracles! All the waters and the distant clouds became an ocean of molten gold and flame. The chestnut trees around the threshing-floor, the thickets, the piles of straw, even the faces and clothing of the people were tinged by the reflections of the dawn. The peaks became purple and the sky a deep indigo. A miracle of light was in the air.

The pilgrims rose, took up their bundles, and continued their journey joyfully, singing and shooting their guns in the air. Now the whole valley resounded with the songs and shots. The faithful pressed slowly up along the slope in a great procession. From the depths of the mountain corridor a dull, human clamor mingled with the clamor of the water.

At about ten o'clock they came in sight of the sanctuary. Under the peak of Aspromonte, in a forest of walnut trees, rose the modest church with the great mass of the convent beside it. Around it the crowd eddied in a confusion of thick dust and strident noises.

"Here is the church," said Caterina, crossing herself.

"Oh, Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Mariuzza, clasping her hands. They all bared their heads and made the sign of the cross.

## ENOUGH

To reach the sanctuary they had to go down a steep, narrow path. The donkey stopped with a sigh of relief as if she knew she would no longer be forced to carry her burden.

“Here you won’t be able to ride,” said Bruno.

“I’ll get down,” said Mariuzza, “for my legs are all numb. Will somebody help me?” And she sought her husband. But it was not prudent to stand her on her feet. Rocco and his son looked at one another in perplexity.

“What shall we do?” asked Rocco.

“What shall we do?” echoed Pietro. “This is what we do.” Swiftly removing his coat, he bent over, took Mariuzza around the knees, and lifted her off the donkey. “Don’t be afraid—put your arms around my neck. I could carry you with one hand. You weigh as little as a pile of figs.” They all laughed and began the descent.

Caravans came down from every point in the valley. The people sang and uttered short, loud cries of “Viva Maria” and continually fired their guns. Among the crowds around the sanctuary and in the nearby wood the shooting was incessant. Little blue clouds rose up through the trees, following the noise of the explosions. They hesitated a moment, then rose in little spirals and disappeared rapidly in the dusty air.

The impression of the vastness of the human mass

## OF DREAMS

that was forming in the valley came more by hearing than by sight. The eye could not take in the whole spectacle at a glance, but the ear could perceive its vast surging like a forest in a wind. From the glades beyond the church, from the gardens around the convent, from the walnut forests and from the slope of the mountains rose a clamorous confusion of voices, of noises and of shouts, as in a tempest. A swarming, milling mob came and went. The voices of the hucksters were confused with the songs of the pilgrims, the braying of donkeys and the explosions of the guns, that crackled as in a battle. And over all that multiple discordant din that boomed like the surf of the sea rose a mingled music of pipes, harmonicas, violins, guitars and Basque tambourines.

The festival of Polsi has nothing of the sadness of those others where the sick and the deformed of a whole region meet in search of pity and help. This festival resembles, more than anything else, a great religious bacchanal, a Dionysiac feast, to which one goes as though to a picnic in the mountains, eats, perhaps prays a little and with purpose, and especially where one dances. The dance is its outstanding characteristic. Wherever four square yards of level ground can be found a pipe or a harmonica makes a circle. The pilgrims range themselves around it, choose a leader—for the dance has its chivalric laws and rules, and may lead

## ENOUGH

to bloodshed in a moment—and begin to dance with the abandon of an orgy, waving their hands, their arms, their hats, their handkerchiefs, and uttering sharp cries like the screams of wild animals. The valley swarms and stamps. For whole days and nights in the sultry heat, sweating, panting, eyes dulled amid the thick smoky dust, the people dance, in a sort of panicky intoxication. There are, to be sure, the ill and the deformed among them, but they are lost in the great joy of the feasting, in the enthusiasms of an excitable people, ready at any moment to love or to shed blood, who, along with an inexhaustible capacity for suffering, have likewise an inexhaustible capacity for joy.

To get to the sanctuary it was necessary to cross the torrent that foamed among the enormous rocks. On the bridge, made of tree trunks and clay, a few Minoites implored charity of the pilgrims who flowed continually across. A robust youth with a great curly head like that of a Greek god, with his shirt open on his huge, white, almost feminine breast, moved rapidly through the crowd on crutches and held out his hand with a sad and petulant cry. He showed a strong, muscular thigh, naked almost to the groin, which hung inert although it showed no external sign of deformity or disease. “By the Blessed Virgin, have pity on a poor young unfortunate who can no longer earn

## OF DREAMS

his bread." And he ran back and forth waving his curls and thumping his crutches with the rapidity of a kangaroo. Another raised into the air a withered arm like that of a mummy, with fingers burned and shapeless. Another had both legs cut off almost to the hips and had put over the stumps a sort of covering of leather reinforced with studs, and he dragged himself along like a great toad, lifting himself on blocks of wood strapped to the palms of his hands.

The pilgrims gave a few pennies and entered the thick of the crowd. Rocco went to the convent in search of Fra Tartagna, a friar who often came to Pandore, in order to get room in the stable for his donkey.

The crowd was varied. There were representatives from almost the whole province. Those from San Luca were dressed in coarse wool, with vests of blue cloth and blue steel buttons. They were agile and robust, with curls on their foreheads and the scars of boils on their cheeks. There were wild shepherds of Solano with their tasseled caps and shoes laced up the legs with leather thongs like the sandals in ancient statues. There were women of Bagnara with the traditional seven skirts of narrow pleats, tight at the waist and wide at the bottom, and blouses of bright colors. They wore their hair parted on the forehead and wound around their heads like a crown. It was said they carried razors in it and could handle a knife bet-

## ENOUGH

ter than their men. Their hazel eyes glittered like metal. There were muleteers of Platí and shepherds of Natile, tall and dirty, with a dragging speech. There were those from Benestare with their women in bright waists. There were the people from the sea, in light, bright colors and deep-burned faces. There were women from Cardita who were reported to be the best and most enduring dancers in the province.

The neighborhood of the sanctuary was covered with the benches of hucksters of all kinds. They sold goods, bright handkerchiefs, silk ribbon of every shade to be worn on the arm as a talisman, medals, charms, images and scapulars. Women dressed in gaudy clothes and with big earrings stretched white towels over their chestnut baskets and poured over them piles of chick-peas. They scooped them up in the scales and let them run back, shouting for buyers. Over improvised counters others sold the spice cakes of Serra San Bruno, shaped in hearts, roosters, jugs or dolls, and trimmed with lines of little colored candies. Smiths displayed the products of their forges on a big gray cloth spread on the ground—axes, pruning hooks, knife blades, plowshares, shovels and other farm tools. The butchers bawled beside quartered rams hung from a plank bristling with hooks and drove away the flies with long branches.

Threatening cries rose in the midst of the crowd.

## OF DREAMS

“Make way—make way! Viva Maria!” The crowd opened. Among the human heads appeared the head of a heifer, its horns adorned with red ribbons. A young man led the animal by a rope while two or three others, stalwart, sweating and panting, drove it on, beating it with sticks or the palms of their hands. It was brought as an offering to the Madonna.

The Blèfaris with some difficulty arrived at the mill where the Pandurioti usually lodged. They found the place overflowing. It was a huge room with its curved rafters exposed, and the walls, the beams and even the tiles of the roof were white with dust from the flour. The great mill-stone under the hopper was still and on it women were sitting. Others prepared food in deep terra cotta dishes bought on the spot. Behind the mill was an open space under a big walnut tree where they danced.

In the mill Pietro found some of the emigrants, Cataldo, the son of Passarelli, Galeoto and Sperlí. They gave him a great welcome, mingling words of a bastard English with those of their dialect. They embraced Gèsu, also, giving him many good wishes for his wife. Their women were happy. They wore all the gold they possessed, and showy undervests and skirts of silk or flowered muslin.

“Come with me,” said Sperlí to Pietro, taking him

## ENOUGH

by the arm. "I want to show you something pretty." Pietro followed him to the dancing.

"Look what we have here," said Sperlí, and pointed. Pietro felt suddenly stunned, as though someone had given him a blow in the stomach. In the middle of the circle of spectators moved a beautiful, stalwart woman. Her face was flushed with excitement, her hair hung loose over her shoulders, her eyes were big and black. Between her full, damp lips her white teeth glistened. She danced, moving her hips to the rhythm of the music and snapping her fingers to its beat. It was Vittoria Papandrea. Around her circled Bruno Ceravolo, gesticulating wildly and wheeling about like a strutting cock. Pietro turned away, his face in flame.

He had prayed to the Madonna to let him forget, and the Madonna had heard him. He had come back all the way from America purposely to thank Her. And here, right in front of Her sanctuary, on Her festival day, he saw Vittoria again, more beautiful and desirable than ever. Any thought of giving her up vanished. He was once more swept off his feet by his furious passion for this woman, who had the perfection and the radiance of a beautiful heifer or a handsome mare.

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN the Blèfaris entered the door of the church they were met by a heavy heat and a human smell that was like a physical barrier. Breathing was almost impossible. The three naves were unbelievably crowded. The people pushed and shoved, panting and shouting as though in a panic.

On a golden throne in the front of the church, behind lighted candles and under a resplendent baldachin, stood the statue of the Virgin and the Babe, with crowns on Their heads. Around the statue the crowd surged and prayed—a sea of anxious, sweaty faces with dull, tear-damp eyes and mouths that breathed heavily and opened wide as the verses of the litany and the savage shouts echoed and re-echoed through the church.

“Make way! Make way!” Rocco cried, raising his hands. “Make way, for we have a sick girl with us. We come asking grace.”

The people closest to him turned around, then with great difficulty they moved aside. “Already a dumb

## ENOUGH

boy is asking grace," the word went round. "Just a boy." They looked at Mariuzza curiously. "Come ahead—come ahead!"

After a long and tiring struggle with elbows and cries they arrived at the feet of the Madonna. A priest behind a railing was receiving offerings and distributing sacred images. Several piles of them, of different sizes and degrees of beauty, were beside him. The money and the gold flowed in incessantly and he gave out the images according to the character of the offerings. Another priest, wearing a mozzetta and a stole, stood beside the statue of the Madonna and recited the litany, imploring pity for the sick.

A boy about fifteen years old was praying before the Virgin. His parents were beside him, the mother a robust, dark-featured woman of Solano, with thick hair and a rapacious face, and the father an uncouth herdsman with a bull neck and a narrow, animal forehead. The boy had been stricken dumb one stormy night when he had seen a wolf in the open countryside with a lamb in its jaws.

"Call to the Madonna, my son, call to the Madonna," his mother urged. "Can't you see how beautiful She is?"

With staring eyes and waving hands the boy uttered a confused gurgle, moving his lips and raising his head toward the statue with painful effort. At every

## OF DREAMS

gurgle that sounded at all like a word those near him shouted: "He speaks! Mary has heard him! A miracle! A miracle!" The church thundered with the shouts of the people, who swayed and beat their breasts. Then they took up the monotonous rhythm of the litany. "*Mater amabilis, Mater admirabilis, Mater creatoris . . .*"

"Call the Madonna now, my son, call the Madonna. Say 'Maria'. Oh, blessed Virgin, hear my prayer!" The mother struck her breast and great tears rolled down her cheeks. "How can you permit, oh Mother of God, that this boy be lost for all his life?" Her voice was high—almost reproving.

Before the end of the litany there was a tumultuous upheaval at the back of the church. The people who were near the door moved and parted. Mighty voices were heard: "Make way—make way!" and furious blows of a stick. In the doorway the people retreated in fear as the head of a young bull appeared among them, with a black face and horns almost horizontal on its huge head, covered with ribbons. "Make way—make way!"

The bull stopped, lifted its damp nose, and let out a bellow that resounded in the church like a roll of thunder. Two husky men held it with a make-shift bridle at the sides of the head. The bull held back. Two others drove it on with guttural cries and beat

## ENOUGH

resounding blows on its flanks. "Avanti! Make way!  
Viva Maria!"

With difficulty and confusion the people opened a path for it. They cried with fear at every move of the beast. It advanced slowly, frightened by the howling mob, by the lights and by the shouts. Now and then it made as if to charge. "Make way! Viva Maria!" Finally it was driven up face to face with the Madonna. "Viva Maria! Viva Maria!"

The mute moved into a corner. With wide eyes he looked at the beast, with its shining blue-black skin, its huge dewlap and its blood-shot eyes, as it stared around breathing heavily through its damp nostrils and licking them with its rasping tongue.

And now the herdsmen and the people close by with shouts and gestures urged it to bend its knees before the Virgin. "Viva Maria!" They beat its knees with sticks. They pushed it with their hands. They coaxed it with soft words. Suddenly the beast, pressed on all sides, bent its head and breathed against the floor. It fell to its knees.

A great roar filled the church, making the glass tremble in the windows. "A miracle, a miracle!" It was the recognition of Divinity by brute nature, by the sacred beast of the stable and the plow. "Viva Maria! Viva Maria!"

The mute, as though gone mad, cried out like a

## OF DREAMS

wounded beast. Then, with staring, fear-filled eyes he stammered: "Maria! Maria! Mamma! Maria!"

His father took him in his arms and lifted him over the crowd. He, too, was staring. His big animal face took on a look of childish terror. The mother wept. "Figlio—figlio, benedetto figlio!"

The people fell to their knees, sobbing, beating their breasts, imploring grace. Eyes were tearful and awed and troubled. Faces were congested and panting like those of men running. Women, seized by sudden mystic fury, tore their hair and lacerated their faces with their nails. Some fainted, drooping like withered stalks. A young woman in the back of the church was suddenly seized with a fit and beat her arms furiously about her and ground her teeth.

The sun, pouring through the huge windows in great sheets of light, invested the gold of the baldachin with triumph. The face of the Virgin was like a star among the candles, with its immutable and heavenly smile.

"Grace! Grace!" shouted the people, and they moved in great waves like agitated water.

The spectacle was terrible and intoxicating. The people wanted more and still more miracles. The presence of Divinity had thrown their simple, primitive souls into delirium.

"Let us, too, ask grace," said Gèsu, very pale, his

## ENOUGH

hair plastered to his sweat-drenched brow. He took his wife by the hand and led her toward the Madonna. The priest began once more to receive the gold on a silver plate.

With loving delicacy Gèsu took the golden rosettes from his wife's ears. Then her rings, her crucifix, her pin with arabesques were all laid in the plate. "I shall buy them back at any price," said Gèsu. The priest nodded his head mechanically.

"What is the matter with this girl," people asked, looking at Mariuzza's pale face and her white, graceful neck, marked under the ear with a circle of red.

"She is blind," answered Caterina, wiping her eyes. "She became blind scarcely six months after her marriage. This is her husband, a fine young man. He has been to America."

"Oh, poor dear—poor girl!" the people murmured. "The Madonna will hear her."

When all the gold was laid before the priest he ordered Mariuzza and her family to kneel, and began to recite the litany in a big, nasal voice.

"Recite with me, bella giovane," he said to Mariuzza. "Recite with me: *Sancta Maria, Sancta dei genitrix, Sancta Virgo Virginum.*"

"*Ora pro nobis,*" answered the people in chorus, striking their breasts with a multiple beat like the feet of a herd tramping a dusty road.

## OF DREAMS

*"Mater purissima—Mater castissima,"* continued the priest, and Mariuzza repeated the words after him in a thread of a voice, with her eyes turned upward.

Her face was extremely pale. The darkness whirled around her. In the hoarse, powerful voices, the excited breathing and the sound of the people beating their breasts she sensed a moving force as of immense winds. It was Divinity as she had imagined it to herself in all the years of her youth, a picture made from popular fancy, from that sort of Christian mythology that peoples houses with angels, caves with anchorites, tumbled walls with purifying spirits and cross-roads with sprites. And now this Divinity shone over her head, flashing with light and with the wings of angels. She felt herself lost, a leaf in a storm, under the murmuring voice of the priest who invoked the Virgin in Her innumerable precious attributes. It seemed to her that the beat of her heart was about to stop under that powerful force. Her eyes throbbed in her head and a trembling shook her whole body.

Rocco and Gèsu prayed with her. They, too, trembled. Their eyes were fixed on the smile of the Virgin, Who seemed to live and breath. Caterina and Varvaro responded: "*Ora pro nobis*" with their hands on their breasts.

Half way through the litany the priest stopped, handed Gèsu a painted candle, and motioned him to

## ENOUGH

hand it to his wife. "Light that candle, bella giovane. See if you can light it."

"See if you can light this candle," said Gèsu gently to his wife. "See if the Madonna will open your eyes."

"Grace, Vergine mia, grace," prayed Mariuzza, her voice choked with emotion. She stretched the candle toward the lights in front of the Virgin without realizing exactly what she was doing. When it happened that the tip of her candle came near a flame a tremendous shout rose from the crowd.

"A miracle, a miracle! She sees already! Viva Maria! She has lighted the candle by herself!"

Mariuzza turned her head slightly, as if bewildered by this clamor, and the shadow in which she was immersed became ever thicker.

"*Rosa Mistica, Turris davidica, Turris eburnea*," the litany went on. At the end the test of the candle was repeated. By some strange chance, after groping here and there with outstretched hand, Mariuzza brought the candle to the flame and the wick caught fire.

"The miracle! The miracle! She sees! Her eyes are opened!" The crowd panted and rocked with emotion.

"Do you see, Mariuzza? Do you really see?" Gèsu asked her with burning throat. But Mariuzza turned to him a face so desolate that his heart grew cold.

"The Madonna has no pity on me," she wept. "The Madonna has no pity on me."

## OF DREAMS

“Pray to Her, my daughter,” exhorted Caterina. “Pray to the Madonna. Call upon her, now that the gates of Heaven are open.”

“Oh Vergine Maria,” Mariuzza began in a strained voice, “hear me. Open your hands. I have come to you with all my faith and I shall not leave unless you hear me. Cure me, Madonna benedetta, and cure my poor husband, who has always sung for You in church.”

In the pulsing silence of the church her prayer was tragic.

“Poverina! Unfortunate girl!” the women whispered around her. “She prays for her husband. She loves him better than herself.”

“Pray for yourself, figlia,” urged Caterina. “Your need is greater than his.”

The people waited, unwilling to believe that this desolate bride with the face of a suffering angel must return home without grace. Little by little, as if irresistibly drawn, all the people began to pray. “A miracle! A miracle! Vergine benedetta, have pity!” The voice of the people rose almost in threat. The lifted hands made terrible gestures. The prayer was a reproof to God. “Don’t you see her, oh Vergine, how beautiful, how young she is? Why have you given her youth—why have you given her eyes? Man without eyes is as dead. It were better to make her die. A miracle! She has been married but a short time. Still before her house

## ENOUGH

is the grain they threw when she crossed its threshold on her wedding day. How can You permit it, Madonna Santa, Mother of God? How can You permit it?"

The Virgin, unmoved, looked down on the mob with Her eternal, detached smile. Hers was a happiness unknown to the hearts of men, a happiness that harmonized with the light of the sun, with the blue of the air, with the green of the forest. She could not see, She could not know the terrible grief of men.

The impatient priest admonished them. The hour was approaching when the Virgin was to be carried in procession. "Come, come! It is time to go. The Madonna does not hear you, povera giovane. She has no miracle for you."

The pilgrims were confused, sad, humiliated in the middle of the crowd. Outside the shots rattled unceasingly and the music of the dance was deafening in the air.

## CHAPTER XVII

PIETRO did not go with his family in the procession. Immediately after they entered the church he gave the priest a hundred lire note, the offering promised by him to the Madonna, and left, making a lane for himself with his Herculean arms.

The image of Vittoria haunted him. Her big black flashing eyes, her youthful face lit up by the dancing, and her magnificent body moving rhythmically, with little steps, remained before his eyes like the violet glint of the sun after one has gazed on it too long.

When he reached the open air he felt that a weight had been lifted from his breast. He wandered around the hucksters' benches, drank a glass of barley water in one gulp to calm his raging thirst, bought some ribbons, and then pushed his way into a circle, following mechanically the rhythm of the dancers, the wail of the pipes, the tinkle of the tambourines. He knew that the women of Cardita were the most famous dancers of Calabria and he searched until he found a couple from that town.

## ENOUGH

Under a majestic tree a big circle of people had formed around a bagpipe. The piper was a squat man with a huge beardless face and rings of gilded metal in his ears. His neck was swollen beyond his cheeks with the effort of blowing. He pressed an enormous wine-skin against his belly, from which hung five hollow canes of different lengths. Two were very long and came down to his knees, two were somewhat shorter, and the last, shaped like a small oboe without any holes, gave forth a single long nasal note that formed the base of the melody. The fingers of the player moved with almost uniform alternation over the holes of the two middle pipes and his head swayed with the tune like a mechanical doll. At times he took his lips from the mouthpiece, took a deep breath, then closed them again and his neck swelled and huge veins bulged from the force of his blowing.

Beside him was a young shepherd with a black curly beard whitened with dust like a tuft of grass beside a wagon road in midsummer, and a white handkerchief tied around his neck. He beat time with a tambourine as big as a flour sieve, which he held close to his ear as if to catch its least vibration.

In the middle of the circle two people danced. The woman was small and dark, with beautiful black hair. She had a broad face with strong jaws, a sharp chin and jet black brows. Her expression was serious, al-

## OF DREAMS

most surly. A dark orange bodice was drawn tight behind her shoulders with long blue laces passed through a double row of small, close-set eyelets, and held in her solid, powerful breast, too large for her small figure. Her blouse was white, buttoned at the neck and wrists, and her skirt of blue pleated fustian, tight at the waist, widened out at the bottom and undulated to the rhythm of the dance. Her bare feet, one in front of the other, pattered in the dust. Her hands rested on her hips, palms now in, now out. Her arms curved like the handles of a jug. Her body swayed slowly, with voluptuous movements of the thighs and haunches. At times she caught up her little red apron by the corners and held it out toward her partner as if to receive a gift. At other times she raised her arms and snapped her fingers with an encouraging gesture, as though calling a dog to the hunt. She kept her eyes on the ground with the seriousness of one who takes part in a religious rite. Suddenly she would raise them boldly to her partner's face, with a seductive raising and lowering of the lids, as though in invitation. Then she would drop them to the ground again. She danced on and on, unmoved, without a sign of weariness. Her firm breast barely lifted with her breathing. Her full lips, slightly separated, showed strong teeth, white as blanched almonds. From her cheeks, golden like bread in the oven, or from the thick hair at the nape

## ENOUGH

of her neck a big drop of sweat rolled down now and then. She had been dancing since morning and had tired out four men.

Her present partner seemed to have been bitten by a tarantula. Shirtless, with a white handkerchief around his neck with love verses worked on it in red thread, his face streaming and his eyes glazed, he leaped around the woman with a thousand kicks and reels, moving his head in an attempt to look into her eyes, circling his arms above her head like a crown, and in gesture tracing a ring around her, as a symbol of his love and to indicate his exclusive possession of her, and then, in a frenzy, he whirled like a top, beat his hands together, and gave sharp cries like the yelping of a dog.

When one partner had danced for a certain length of time the tambourine player, who acted as master of the dance, got to his feet, made a wide dancing circle around the couple, then took off his cap, and with a knightly bow, dismissed the man and invited another to take his place.

The Madonna was already outside the church, and the shouts of "Viva Maria!" and the firing of guns were deafening in the air. The explosions came from all directions. The air was filled with smoke and the smell of burnt powder.

Pietro stood for a time watching the woman dance,

## OF DREAMS

with his heart in tumult. An irresistible desire drew him toward the mill to see Vittoria again, and at the same time a strange fear urged him to go far away from her. His offering to the Virgin should have given him forgetfulness, but deep in his heart he knew he could never forget. He fought against his passion. "Give me strength, Santa Vergine," he prayed. "Give me strength."

Finally he left the dancing and went toward the mill with his head aflame and in his heart a black foreboding. When he arrived it was deserted. The Pandurioti were either watching the slowly advancing procession or were behind the mill. Pietro stopped a moment to listen to the roar of the water, and then he, too, went behind the mill.

Vittoria was again dancing with Bruno Ceravolo. How beautiful she seemed to him, Vergine Santissima, with her big rosy face flushed in the heat, and her big, damp mouth, from which laughter gurgled like a jet of water, and her luminous eyes! The physical discomfort, which the thought of her always gave him, returned. His eyes clouded over as if from an excessive influx of blood, his heart swelled up, and his whole body seemed to be a steel bow, drawn to its limit by a mighty hand.

Suddenly Vittoria tired and stopped dancing. She went toward the entrance of the mill, wiping her face

## ENOUGH

with a handkerchief. She was breathing heavily and little drops of sweat glistened on her temples. Her voluptuous mouth wore a satisfied smile. When she saw Pietro she went to meet him with surprise and pleasure in her eyes.

“Oh, Pietro, are you here, too? Won’t you even speak to me?” She took him by the arm and almost dragged him into the mill. “When did you get back from America? I haven’t seen you—I didn’t know you were home. We are up at the Gnura Duvica looking after the figs and vines. We never see anybody. How strong and handsome you’ve grown! You look like a doctor.”

She laughed at his embarrassment as he watched her, fascinated, unable to move, like a bird charmed by a serpent.

“I came home two nights ago,” said Pietro. “I’ve hardly been in the village at all. We came with Mariuzza to ask grace of the Madonna.”

“Yes, poor thing,” said Vittoria in fleeting pity, “I have seen her. The punishment of God! And where are your people now?”

“I left them in the church.”

“Oh, Pietro, how glad I am to see you again!” She put her hand in her bag and took out a spice cake shaped like a rooster. “Do you want some, Pietro?” she asked, and bit off its head. “Why do you look at

## OF DREAMS

me like that? Do you still bear me ill will because I didn't wait for you? Ah, it was my destiny, my Pietro. Marriages and bishops are made in Heaven."

"That's true," Pietro sighed. "That's true. But I feel as though my head was leaving me. I still have you in my thoughts, as I did when I left for America, and this morning when I saw you dancing under the trees I thought the ground would give way under my feet." He was very pale and spoke with his eyes downcast. His fists were clinched in his pockets. He shook his head bitterly.

"Poor Pietro! But I like you a lot, especially now that you are dressed like a gentleman. Come here, sit down beside me and tell me about America."

Vittoria laughed happily, making fun of him a little, as she always did, taking pleasure in encouraging him with the physical charm that radiated from her in a heady perfume.

"Bene," said Pietro, "what's done is done. But are you contented—are you happy?"

"I?" she asked. "What do I lack? I've got property, I've got money. I don't want anything else."

Pietro sighed deeply.

"And aren't you thinking of getting married now?" asked Vittoria. "You must have brought some money back from America."

## ENOUGH

“Yes, I brought some, but I have no use for it. I wanted to earn it for you.” And he made such a queer face that Vittoria burst into a gale of laughter, spraying a shower of cake crumbs from her lips.

“And what would you say, Pietro, if I told you I loved you a little?” she asked, putting her head near his.

“If you love me even a little,” said Pietro, “let me tie this red ribbon on your arm. I bought it on purpose. Then when you are with Bruno you will remember me.”

“Why not?” said Vittoria. She unbuttoned her sleeve at the wrist and rolled it up as far as her arm-pit, showing a magnificent arm with white skin covered with light down. “There you are—tie it on. I want to make you happy.”

Before that naked arm and that warm, desirable flesh, Pietro had an insane impulse to seize her, but he held himself in. He took the ribbon from his pocket and with hands that trembled, passed it around her arm and knotted it slowly, excited to frenzy by the touch of her skin, as soft as the skin of a peach. As he tied the ribbon his eyes gazed avidly on her neck and breast, and he bent closer to her. Her breast lifted gloriously with her breathing and gave off a warm, pungent scent. In the hollow of her throat he saw her blood pulse. He watched the slight movement of the

## OF DREAMS

skin with fascinated, hungry eyes. Vittoria ate and smiled and kept watch on the door.

Suddenly Pietro's eyes met hers. They looked at one another a moment. She raised her eyebrows in invitation. Her eyes seemed to grow languid with sudden, sharp desire. She bent her head and offered her mouth. Pietro took her. He kissed her furiously and long. His breath came in little sobs and little cries rose in his throat.

A hoarse shout startled them. In the door stood Ceravolo.

"Ah, strumpet," he snarled, with his fist doubled up and his eyes savage, "you are a true daughter of your mother! I'll cut your throat, you. First him, and then you."

From the waistband of his trousers he drew a knife shaped like an olive leaf with a carved bone handle in one swift gesture, and threw himself on them as they still clung together.

Pietro was unarmed but he was not afraid. That kiss had intoxicated him like a cup of old wine perfumed with cloves. He was almost happy to measure himself against his rival, even without arms. Now that he knew he had, even in a very small degree, entered the heart of the woman who had maddened him for so long, he felt he could have fought with a lion and conquered.

## ENOUGH

He pushed Vittoria far away from him, behind the hopper, and looked around for something with which to defend himself. There was nothing, not even a stick of wood. He quickly resolved to face his rival and disarm him with his bare hands. As Bruno leaped at him, his knife raised, spitting like a cat, Pietro stretched out his hands in defense. With one hand he parried the blows that rained down on him, and with the other he grabbed for the knife. Vittoria, panting with fear and pale as death, whispered, "Focu meu! Focu meu!"

A great shout rose in the street: "Viva Maria!" The firing of guns made the mill tremble. For a moment Pietro forgot where he was. Bruno, circling around him with the agility of a cat, leaped in. His knife sank to the hilt. Pietro staggered, clutching his hands to the wound, and fell to his knees. Then seeing Bruno jump for Vittoria, he rose to his feet and threw himself on his rival with so much fury that they both rolled to the ground, clinging to each other's throats like dogs. Vittoria rushed out, shouting like mad. "Accorrete, cristiani, help, help! They kill each other!"

The road before the mill was solid with people who walked ahead of the statue of the Madonna. Borne on the shoulders of twenty robust pilgrims, She swayed slowly above the sea of heads, all gleaming with gold in the sunlight, her eyes fixed on the people, wearing her eternal, unmoved smile.

## OF DREAMS

“Viva Maria! Viva Maria!”

“Help, help!” shouted Vittoria, and fell in terror toward the crowd.

The Pandurioti who were around the mill were the first to reach the struggling men. A terrible sight lay before them. Bruno Ceravolo had quickly gained the upper hand, and with a bestial fury, had stabbed Pietro again and again. Pietro, his shirt torn to shreds on his breast and his blood flooding out, lay flat on the floor with his arms stretched wide like a cross. Ceravolo, at sight of the people, tried to run, but was roughly seized by the crowd.

“Who is it? Who is the dead man?”

“Pietro Blèfari. The son of Rocco.”

“He got back from America only two days ago, poor devil.”

“Why did he kill him?”

Questions and answers crossed each other. Voices were lifted in weeping. The people crowded before the door and milled around, everybody trying to see and to learn the cause of the fight. A circle formed around the weeping, trembling Vittoria.

“Who killed him? Where are they from? Why did he kill him?”

The bagpipes behind the mill fell silent and the dancers crowded in the door.

“Make way, make way,” shouted Nino Sperlì.

## ENOUGH

“Can’t you see he still lives? He still breaths. Let us carry him outside.”

Four men took him by the arms and legs and laid him gently on the grass behind the mill. As their hands left him his breathing stopped.

The procession went on slowly.

Then the carabinieri came. They took hold of the murderer, who, as though in a stupor, still held the knife tight in his hand, and demanded to know the cause of the fight.

“Women, Signor Maresciallo,” said Sperlì. “A woman.”

“And where is the woman?”

“There she is,” and they all pointed out Vittoria, weeping in the middle of a group of strangers. The carabinieri took her, too, and led her away. Two of them remained to guard the dead man.

Just at that moment the Madonna arrived in front of the mill, and the Blèfaris, who were following, stopped to rest. When Rocco saw the tumultuous confusion of people and heard that someone had been killed, he came over, filled with uneasy fear.

“A dead man?” he asked. “Where is he?” and he tried to approach the place where the crowd was thickest. Just then the crowd opened and two carabinieri came out, pulling Bruno Ceravolo with them. Two others followed with Vittoria. Both were hand-

## OF DREAMS

cuffed. Rocco thought the earth would open beneath his feet.

“Disgrazia mia!” he cried, striking his head with his fists. “The dead man is my son.”

“Where are you going, Rocco? Where are you going?” The weeping Pandurioti tried to hold him back. “Listen a moment—come here.” But the old man went on, with his head bent.

“Gèsu, don’t go—come here,” the people said. Some tried to comfort Mariuzza, who seemed to be drained of blood, she was so pale. “Lucky for her she can’t see, poor girl. What a misfortune! What a misfortune!”

Fearfully they discussed the fate of Vittoria. In the minds of them all was the memory of her mother’s curse.

“Did you see?” said the women. “God save us, her mother’s curse struck her like lightning from the sky. God doesn’t pay Saturdays, but He’s sure pay, just the same.”

“May you not enjoy your youth,” her mother had said, and she would not enjoy it. For Bruno she had asked a prison cell, and behold, God had heard her. It mattered little that Porzia was, herself, a sinner. The Lord gives justice to all.

In the golden sky of that afternoon, amid the clamor of the festival, up there where the unchanging blue looked down like an immense eye upon the tops of the

## ENOUGH

mountains, upon the houses and lives of men, a serene and terrible Presence regulated human events and distributed punishment according to the laws of a supreme justice.

When Rocco saw his dead son, his bloodless face with its expression of almost infantile grief, his inert mouth and his open, extinguished eyes, he fell to his knees and striking his head with his hands, cried out: "Figlio, figlio, banner of my house, giovinetto mio! You have come from America to seek your death, and they have killed you. You have shed blood like Christ."

He touched the dead face delicately, as if afraid to wake him, and caressed his hair and sought out the wounds through the tattered, bloody shirt. Big tears ran down his face and fell onto the hands and the breast of his dead son.

"Rocco, Rocco, get up. Go away from here. Do you want to die, too? It is the judgment of God, and what can be done about it?" the peasants said to him. But he answered angrily: "Will you take my son from me before I weep for him?"

When Gèsu saw the lake of blood on the floor of the mill he fainted. They sprinkled water on his face and carried him outside.

Mariuzza wept aloud, calling for Pietro and linking her own misfortune with his, who had been cut off so tragically in the flower of his youth. The Varvaros,

## OF DREAMS

struck down with sorrow, looked at one another as if to ask whence came so much misery to the house of Blèfari in which they had placed their ward.

“Dio mio, what house have we put her in?” said Caterina to herself. “One would say that a curse from Heaven was working to destroy it. And yet Rocco has always been a good man, and his poor wife was a saint. Why, caro mio Dio, why is there so much snow on a mountain and so much sorrow in a house?”

The procession had passed and the shouts and the firing of guns faded slowly away. Parties of pilgrims on the slope of the valley left the sanctuary shouting great choral cries: “Viva Maria!”

## CHAPTER XVIII

*A*UTUMN came, a sad autumn that year. Great storms broke down the olive trees and overflowed the rivers. In the house of the Blèfaris one misfortune followed another.

Gèsu lost the use of his legs and, in the first days of winter, took to his bed with the lower part of his body completely paralysed. Mariuzza, in her blindness, could help but little and spent the days by his bed weeping.

The villagers looked at the house in awe as they went by, and strange tales went around about Gèsu's sickness. Somehow it leaked out that he had caught the disease from a woman in America, and due to the Pharasaical morality that exists in all men, even the simplest, comments became malevolent. Sometimes they reached the ears of Mariuzza and she sorrowed over the gossip more than over her blindness, since it was her husband they slandered, and he was suffering in his bed like a saint.

The Varvaros wanted to take Mariuzza out of the

## OF DREAMS

house, over which a terrible fate seemed to hang, but when they hinted it to her and saw how she took it they realized that it would be impossible. She loved her husband with a love so absolute that she would end up by hating them if they insisted.

Gèsu had practically become an imbecile. Every day he became weaker, and he whimpered like a little child. He needed help continually, to turn over in his bed, to fix the cushions under his head and to keep the flies from him. Mariuzza, with a little fan made of strips of paper fastened to a stick, gropingly drove them away.

“Gèsu, how do you feel today?” she would ask.  
“Have courage, my love, have courage.”

Although his mind was weak, Gèsu felt almost strangled by the emotion which her words caused in his heart.

The one who resisted the storm was Rocco. As a mighty oak, which the lightning strikes and the fire devours yet puts out new green shoots with every spring, so Rocco stood, staunch, working for all, supplying the house with grain and wood and fruit and green things. He gave up none of his customary practices. At dawn he was on his rounds with his reed basket, gathering manure. In the evening he never returned from the fields without a handful of dry wood or a big mastic root for the fire, and, since his donkey

## ENOUGH

had died from fatigue after the journey to the Madonna of the Mountain, he now considered buying another. The tragedy of his family oppressed his heart, and more than once, in his prayers, he asked God the reason for all the sorrows that had descended on his house. But his soul was quieted by a stupendous, stoic resignation.

“Everything comes from God,” he would say. “He knows the why of things. What can we know, ignorant as we are, of why He sends the rain and the wind, the tempest and the sunshine?”

Accustomed to feel the working of God present every day—in the trees that grew and brought forth fruit, in the sprouting grain, in the plants in his garden, each of which had its season and its flower and its beauty—taught to venerate the orderliness of nature and to consider its workings as manifestations of the plans of Providence—he raised his eyes to Heaven as if he were in a great church, and worshiped the will of the Lord, even its terrible and mysteriously necessary severity.

After some months of lying in bed Gèsu had a new and terrible suffering. Two big sores opened in the lower part of his back. To keep him clean required a sea of linen every day. A woman was necessary to take care of that alone. Mariuzza then turned to Giusa, who came every evening to visit her brother with her baby

## OF DREAMS

in her arms and with her poverty showing in her face.

“Do me a favor,” said Mariuzza. “Help me to keep him clean, and I will supply your needs.”

Thus Giusa, little by little, called back by sorrow and by necessity, returned home. In the daytime she left her baby with Mariuzza and went to the stream to wash her brother’s linen—horrible linen, filled with pus, urine and filth. And never a movement of repugnance and never a feeling of fatigue assailed her. Before these ugly things she wept for her brother and could not do enough for him, considering her work as if it were an expiation of her sin.

Winter passed and Easter was drawing near. Gèsu grew worse daily. On Good Friday morning he insisted on getting out of bed to see the procession. They put him on a chair, clothed as best they could, and carried him out into the street. They covered him with a coarse woolen cloak, because the morning air was cold.

At dawn on Good Friday in Pandore there takes place a procession that is a sort of sacred drama, portraying the carrying of the Holy Body to the sepulchre. That morning the church groaned with people. The whole town assembled for the sad ceremony when dawn was barely whitening the sky.

When on the altar appeared the cross, an immense flat wooden cross with a long sudario hung on the

## ENOUGH

arms, Palamara, with her great voice, intoned a majestic hymn of redemption.

*Evviva le cruci—surgentì di gloria . . .*

Then the procession issued from the church and proceeded toward a hill which they called Calvary. When it arrived in the *Ruga Grande* the sun was not yet visible over the sea. At the head was the cross that swayed in the limpid air of the morning as it passed between the sad little houses of the town. Then followed the dead Christ, a little wooden Christ like a twelve year old boy, carried on the shoulders of eight young men who wore great crowns of thorns on their heads. Its knees and elbows were scraped, its limbs were livid, and its hair and its beard were clotted with drops of blood.

Behind the Christ came a little party of singers, Don Gianni Cúfari, Don Gialormo, Galeoto and a few others—the most famous cursers of the village. From little manuscript books they sang a series of distichs and the people responded to them in chorus. Following them came a big statue of the Madonna Addolorata, with a big black cloth over her blue mantle, a little crucifix on her arm and the seven swords in her breast. The people followed with bared heads.

The voices of the singers rang out:

## OF DREAMS

*Gesù mio, con dure funi,  
le tue mani chi mai legò?*

and the people answered, striking their breasts:

*Sono stato io, l'ingrato!  
Gesù mio, perdono e pietà.*

As the song rose above the silent houses, sad, wailing as a lament, it seemed even sadder by contrast with the twittering of the sparrows which, in the intervals, were heard on the roofs. The faces of the people were all sad. It seemed that they, who in their eyes and in their clothes bore so many signs of suffering, accused themselves of the Passion of the God-Man.

*Gesù mio, d'acute spine  
il tuo capo chi incoronò?*

and the people answered:

*Sono stato io, l'ingrato!  
Gesù mio, perdono e pietà.*

As the procession advanced, Gèsu sat with his hands slightly trembling and his eyes almost sightless, as emaciated as a shadow. He could barely recall the days when he went to church to sing, when his beau-

## ENOUGH

tiful tenor voice chanted through the streets of the town.

Rocco was on his knees at his right hand and Mariuzza at his left. They beat their breasts and wept silently.

As the people passed by they commiserated with them in the pauses of the hymn. The Madonna, with her beautiful, thin, sorrowful face, with two big tears motionless on her cheeks, seemed to look at Gèsu and say, "Don't you see that I, too, weep? Don't you see that I, too, suffer? Everything is sorrow in the world." The procession passed and turned the corner into the street of the Guardia.

The sun rose. The tops of the olive trees, damp with morning dew, gleamed in the light, and the new leaves of tender yellow stood out against the dark of the branches. The grain was a green shadow on the hills. All the trees were in bud and some had put forth flowers. A great serenity lay over the damp, green fields.

Mariuzza rose to her feet, conquered by an irresistible need of weeping, and so that Gèsu would not hear her, went and sat near the stairs, hiding her face in her apron.

Giusa put her baby on the ground and went down toward the Murello to spread out the clothes on a hedge. Rocco looked at the glory of the morning with

## OF DREAMS

its pure light diffused under a clear sky, and the green of the fields, and the flowering gardens, and the promise of the grain, and he felt himself soften and become reconciled with life. How beautiful the country and how great its gifts.

“Why, oh Lord,” the old peasant asked in his heart, looking at the hills and the trees as though they were loved ones. “Why have you given us a land so beautiful, and yet have denied us bread? Had it not been for this poverty my sons would not have gone to America and my children would not have died.”

While he meditated Giusa returned from the garden. Her child had crawled to the chair where Gèsu sat and now was pulling at the laces of his shoes with its chubby little hands. Giusa leaned over her brother, and seeing that his head had fallen heavily on his breast, she put a hand on his shoulder and called him tenderly. His mouth was open in a horrible way and a thread of saliva drooled down on his chest. His eyes were half open and unseeing.

“Father—oh, father,” she called in a frightened whisper, “come here. I think he is dead.”

Rocco came and bent over him.

“He is dead, figlio benedetto, he is dead! Don’t cry out or Mariuzza will hear. Help me to carry him into the house.”

While father and daughter carried him up the stairs

## ENOUGH

in their arms the hymn of expiation came from afar  
on the fresh air of the morning.

*Gesú mio, di fiele e aceto  
le tue labbra chi abbeverò?*

and the people answered:

*Sono stato io, l'ingrato!  
Gesú mio, perdono e pietà.*









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